

(ORIGINAL VERSION)

MOSES:

HIS LIFE AND ITS LESSONS

BY THE REV.

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THE LITTLE CHILD

“And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son, and she called his name Moses.” —Exodus ii. 10

IN commencing our study of the life of Moses we need but very few words of introduction. A life so noble and so devoted cannot fail to stimulate and strengthen us. This triumphant faith, this sublime patience, this unfaltering courage must minister to the highest life of the soul. And throughout these chapters it is not Moses only of whom I want us to think, but also of ourselves,—not of the dead past but of the living present. I want to get down to that abiding truth which concerns every one of us here and now. The Bible could never be what it is to men if it were only the record of how God dealt with the world some thousands of years ago. It is the revelation of how God is still dealing with the world: the revelation of the great principles of the Divine procedure; the manifestation of a love and power and wisdom that have to do with us to-day as much as with Moses in Egypt.

The story opens with an account of the sorrows of Israel at this time. An interval of some four hundred years lies between the Books of Genesis and Exodus, between the going down of Jacob into Egypt and the birth of Moses. That “going down” was a much more important matter than a hasty reading of the earlier verses would lead us to think. “Seventy souls” represent the descendants from Jacob; but every man’s *household* adds very greatly to the company. When we remember that Abraham had three hundred and eighteen armed men in his house, we get an idea of the position of these chieftains and their following. It would be a company in all, probably, of some three or four thousand persons that went down with Jacob. During the lapse of the centuries which had passed since their coming, they are supposed to have grown into a people numbering two millions, and that in the midst of a nation of some six or seven millions.

Joseph was dead long since; and those who had no share in his benefits did not regard his brethren. Egypt was in danger of an invasion from the very land from which the Israelites had come. The forces of the enemy would have to pass first through the region of country where they dwelt. It was naturally a cause of much fear that the Israelites would join the enemy and surrender to them the rich tract of land on which they had settled, and also swell the forces against Egypt. So this Pharaoh resolved to get rid of the nation. They were called from their work as shepherds to labour in building the cities; they were made slaves, burdened and beaten. Beneath the fierce sun they quarried the stones and had to drag the huge burdens to the wall, whilst the taskmasters with whips and curses urged them in their toil. Or they had to work in the slime pits, shaping the clay and making the bricks, serving with rigour, their lives made bitter. But this drudgery did not diminish their numbers. The more they were afflicted the more they multiplied and grew. Pharaoh then resolved on more desperate measures, and directed that the nurses should kill the males at their birth. But this failed; the nurses feared God more than they feared Pharaoh. And now the edict is issued that every male child should be cast into the river. The daughters should be saved; but their safety meant a life more dreadful even than the fate of the sons.

Now at such a time it is that there is born in one of the Hebrew households a child as beautiful as day. The good man and his wife had already a son and a daughter, but this little one was none the less dear on that account. Thank God, it needs not much beauty for any mother to think her little one exceeding beautiful, but this child seems to have been of marvellous beauty. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that “By faith Moses when he was born was hid three months of his parents, because they saw that he was a *proper* child—a perfect child”; and Stephen uses the same word in Acts vii. 20: “In which time Moses was born and was exceeding fair,” or, as the margin has it, “*fair to God.*”

Over this little one so dear, so beautiful, there stretched the cruel hand of the law—it should be cast into the river. Ah! what hours were they when the mother looked upon her son

with breaking heart until her eyes were blinded by her grief. How she started at the sound of footsteps, dreading the coming of the executioner. How she hushed its cry lest the passerby should betray her secret. How it haunted her day and night—the scene of those dreadful waters where the creatures lay waiting for their prey—until it seemed better to long for the child's death than his life. How sometimes she dreaded that the end was come, the child was torn from her breast and flung into the river; and waking with a shriek, she stretched out eager hands for the little one, and laid him right against her heart, and feared to sleep again lest he should suffer.

And thus, dear friends, may we too dwell earnestly and sadly upon the perils that beset our children. Within them are a thousand dreadful possibilities—the power of evil, subtle and incessant, leading them astray. Outside there waits for them a world full of snares and temptations. Alas, at home also they are apt to suffer—the victims at times of a love foolish in its goodness and too indulgent, and now of some annoyance in which the punishment is altogether out of proportion to the real offence. Do not let us put away the thought of these perils, great and almost numberless: perils beside which that river and its waiting beasts of prey are but a little. Go into our prisons and see who fill them. Go into the public-houses and see the faces stamped and branded with drink; the brutal husband and father; the mother hardened, deadened to almost everything but the craving for the accursed drink. Go into the streets and see the wretched ones in their gaiety who lurk and linger at its corners. All these, the betrayers and their victims, were the little children of but a few years ago—little children over whom mothers hung with fond hope and glowing desire. We too, like this mother of old, may well shrink and fear because of the perils that beset our children.

But let us turn again to our story. *These perils drove her to God.* This mother gets among the splendid heroes of the world by her victory over these very perils. We find her, and her husband too, having a place in that roll-call of honour in connection with this event—“By faith Moses when he was born was hid three months of his parents, because they saw that he was a proper child, and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.” This mother took hold of God on her child's behalf, and she kept hold of Him. And there, as she kneeled and pleaded, she seems to have received some Divine intimation of what the little child was going to do and to be. The decree of the haughty Pharaoh had gone out that all the sons of the Hebrews shall be cast into the river; and yet from these very sons shall rise up one whom the king's daughter shall adopt and train and educate as a prince; and he shall be the means of overthrowing Pharaoh and all the host of chariots and horsemen, and of bringing the people forth into the land of promise with a great deliverance.

As she kneels before God, the God of Israel, we can think that her dreams are sometimes of one who stands with hands stretched over the water, and they divide and let the host of Israel go through triumphant, leaving for ever the land of bondage; of one who stands again with hands stretched out, and those waters that were upheld like crystal walls, sweep down upon the armies of Egypt. Does she hear the voice of the little Miriam singing, “*God blew with His breath, the sea covered them. They sunk as lead in the mighty waters*”? Oh, press him to thy heart, mother, and let fair visions fill thy soul as thou dost thank God that unto thee is born a man-child by whom God shall do greater things than ever thou couldst ask or think.

By all means let us think of the perils that beset our children. *But let the perils drive us to the Throne of Grace.* There we shall find the other side. Every child that is born into the world partakes of evil; but of this too be sure, that every child that is born into the world partakes of grace. Talk about original sin by all means, that there is in the child a tendency to evil. But talk about grace too. Never a child is born into the world but it is God's child,—dear to the very heart of God, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, heir of the kingdom of Heaven. We all believe it if the little one dies. Why not believe it when the child lives? Is Death the great Sanctifier, or is it only the children that die whom God loves? O mother, father, I want you to find for your children not these fears of peril only but in this love and grace of our God such hopes as this mother of old found there. Go to your prisons, your public-houses, your dens of infamy and see the children of some few years ago. *But do not only go there.* Go to the churches

too; go to the philanthropic work, to the thousand forms of benevolent agencies, to the tens and thousands of men and women who are helping to make this world better. These, too, were the little children of some few years ago. These are the blessed possibilities that lie within the littles ones of to-day. Like this mother of old, let us come boldly to God and claim His help. Our children are dear to Him as was this child of long ago. For us there are a thousand gracious promises. Take hold of them as your own. Greater than the forces of evil within or about them is that which is within our reach—the help and blessing of our God. Count what you and your children have in Him. Here are hopes great and splendid as the love of God; strong and glorious as the grace of Christ; real and mighty as the blessed Spirit's power. Let fear watch: there are perils. Let faith be glad: we have the Almighty Father to help us.

Now comes the next chapter of our story. *The child can be no longer hid.* It may have been that her secret was discovered, that some unfriendly eye had seen the little one; or that the time for searching the houses of the Israelites had come. The poor mother, driven to her wits' end, is yet only driven nearer to God for help. Does she remember how once before the household of God had been in danger of perishing from water? And that God commanded an ark to be builded for the saving of that house; and how that thus floating on the waters of destruction His servants outrode the perils and stepped forth by and by as into a new heaven and a new earth. In a like peril she will have a like faith, and will seek a like deliverance. Under cover of night the father goes forth to the river's brink to gather the great water-flags that grow there; then creeps cautiously back with his burden. The mother and the trusty Miriam are busy plaiting the broad leaves together to form a basket. How often the eye is turned towards the goodly child lying all unconscious of the danger that awaits him; and a great sigh goes up from the troubled heart. Then the basket is made watertight by the coating of pitch. And now with faintest break of day the hour has come. For the last time, as she may think, the little one lies against the mother's heart. Setting the child within the basket she hurries away to the river, and lays it down at the water's edge amidst the tall reeds. She lingers a moment to look at that sweet face—so lonely, so helpless, exposed to so many perils, with none to help him—save only God. Then leaving little Miriam to watch, she goes home to kneel alone and plead with the Most High.

So there comes a time in the history of every lad and maiden when *they cannot be hid.* Screened and guarded tenderly at home, sooner or later they must go forth—to school, to business, to service; lonely, exposed to many perils. Well, what then? We must do for our children what the parents did for this little one. We must weave the promises of God into an ark of safety and lay them down in it. Out of God's tender care and love let our prayer fashion the ark of their deliverance. It is ours to put them right into the arms of God. A mother's prayers are the children's best protection. The tender love of the Heavenly Father, His gracious care and promises, are the blessed material with which we may build the ark—they are ever waiting for us beside the river of God which is full of water.

And now the dreary minutes pass slowly away; the mother's heart rent between hope and fear; faith looking up to God, and then fear staying to listen to its own whispers. How can she dare to hope for the child? Wild beasts and floods and cruel foes lie all around her little one. Yet faith looks up again and feels that all is right. God is above them all, and she can trust her little one to His care.

Forth from the palace comes the king's daughter, and goes down to the river. As she walks along the banks with her maidens she sees the strange basket laid in the reeds, and little dreaming what is in it she bids one fetch it. And there when it was opened she found the little sleeping child. Roused by the sudden light and frightened by the many faces that gathered to look down upon it the child cried. At once with womanly tenderness she took the little babe, and seeing its beauty she said, "This is one of the Hebrew children." Then forth came the trusty Miriam all eagerly and asked, "Shall I go and call thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?" And presently in upon the mother burst the panting messenger, and told her all the wondrous story.

Look at it: for it is a sight worth looking at and lingering over until we can catch something of its blessedness for our own. There stands the mother with a joy that is almost overwhelming, taking her child from the arms of the king's daughter. *"Take away this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay thee thy wages."*

"For me!" Ah, how safe is the little one now! The king's daughter cares for him and calls him her own. Powerless now are the perils that threaten him. The decrees and threats of the king are spent and harmless now. *For me*, said the king's daughter. And those words girt the little one about with safety. Every soldier in the land grasped his weapon now for his defence. All the wealth of Egypt ministered to his wants. All the might of Pharaoh was available for his protection. The poor child of the Hebrews is called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

There is for us a like blissing in these words if we can but rightly learn the lesson. They teach—that we may just take our children one by one, with all our fears, with all their weakness, and give them into the ark of His salvation, into the arms of His love that He may embrace them with His mercy and lay upon them His hands. And then it is ours to receive them back from the hands of our God as a charge from Him, to be held as belonging to Him, and to be trained for His service. We must know it as true and real. It will avail us nothing to think about it as a pretty sentiment, a poetical idea. We must know it as a living reality: real as the sins and temptations of life are real; real as the daily and hourly cares that beset the soul;—that God Himself holds our children dear to His heart; that Christ the Lord calls them His little ones; that the Holy Spirit is come to dwell within them and make them wise unto salvation. Now are all the great might and riches of our God available for every one of us in this work of training the children. Be true to this belief. Let hope and desire and faith be according to the greatness of this Love and in keeping with the provisions of His grace. Should the mother of this little child measure her ability by her husband's scanty earnings or by the product of their own little patch? No; it must be from the palace of the king that she must fetch his provision; his dress, his food, all his belongings must be in keeping with the dignity of a prince. All that the God of Heaven is and all that He has is ours to draw upon for this work of training His little ones, whom He has trusted to our keeping.

II.

YOUTH AND MANHOOD

“And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.” —Acts of the Apostles, vii. 22

TO the little Hebrew household whose fortunes we are following, there comes now a greater sorrow than that which before had filled their hearts. Over the child there hung a deadlier peril. Even the waters of the Nile were less to be feared than the court of Pharaoh and all the temptations that there awaited Moses. The months have gone by, making her son more beautiful than ever to the mother's eyes; and every day seemed to leave him dearer. But he must go.

Let us remember how easy a thing it would be for the mother to hide him now. Amidst the crowds of the Hebrews, huddled together as they were in their affliction and poverty, they might have readily concealed themselves and their little one. In a few months he would have grown out of all recognition; and it would probably have been thought a thing much too small to make a great ado about—that one of these foolish people had taken the trouble to hide her child rather than let it be adopted by the king's daughter.

But the mother takes the child, a little wondering boy of some two or three years, and leaves him at the palace. It was a brave faith that wove the reeds together and made the ark of bulrushes and laid him down on the brink of the river and left him there, counting that God was able to deliver him from the perils of that hour. It was almost a braver faith that now took the little lad from the lowly home to the splendours of the palace, and left him in the hands of the daughter of Pharaoh, counting that God was able to deliver him through all the days of his youth and the years of his manhood. The relation of foster-mother, it is true, was continued with much intimacy, not only on the part of the nurse but of the family in which the child had been nursed, so that the influences of the Hebrew household would not by any means be cut off. Yet against this must be set the besetments of its luxury, its opportunities of self-indulgence, and the force of its example.

Stephen tells us concerning Moses that “he was learned in all the learning of the Egyptians.” What this phrase may mean is very vividly illustrated by Professor Rawlinson in his *Life of Moses*. The greater part of his childhood was probably spent in the Palace of Memphis, and from its terraces he would look forth on the scenes which stirred his earliest thought. Before him opened the great city of Phthah, its colossal architecture rising up with vivid distinctness in that clear atmosphere. Throngs of busy people filled the streets and squares. On the river passed the laden ships, their sails gaily painted. About the temple moved the stately processions, headed by the priests resplendent in their robes, and sometimes in the midst of the crowd was led the sacred bull, whilst the strains of music floated on the air. Afar off on the verge of the desert rose the great pyramids, the tombs of the mighty kings.*

*Rawlinson, *Life of Moses*, page 23.

It was impossible that this child of the Hebrews could have been raised to such a position without being exposed to the jealousy of those about the king. Josephus tells us that on one occasion the Princess Thermuthis brought her little son into the presence of Pharaoh her father, that she might show him the beauty of the child and his brave spirit, and also in the hope that she might induce the king to make him his successor. The princess set the little lad upon the king's knee, and the king to humour her took off his crown and placed it on the child's head, whereon the child slipped from the king's knee and stood up. Then he took off the crown and set it on the ground, and lifting his little foot he tried to stand on it. In the royal presence was a famous scribe who had prophesied before the birth of Moses that there should come into the world about that time a Hebrew child who should lower the greatness of Egypt and triumph over her power. The scribe watched the child and then came forward and cried: “See, O King, the child of the Hebrews of whom the gods have warned us! He himself confirms the prophecy. Has he not set thy sovereignty beneath his feet and sought to trample on thy

crown? Kill him, that the Egyptians may cease to fear and that the Hebrews may cease to hope." Then the mother seized the child and hurried with him from the palace of the king, and thus, adds Josephus, "a second time was he delivered from death."

His very appearance seems to have been such that it arrested everybody's attention. That beauty of which the Scriptures speak is confirmed by tradition. So "goodly to look to" was he, at once so full of modesty and dignity, that as he passed along the streets all heads were turned to gaze on him. Tall, full of spirit, and capable of great endurance, and of such intelligence that he excelled in whatever he attempted, it was plain that this child was destined to be no ordinary man; and his presence filled the Egyptians with suspicion and gave to the Hebrews a new confidence.

The Egyptian training was fitted to turn the material of which this lad was made to the best account. Athletic games of all kinds developed both strength and courage. The mere matter of learning to read and write, so easy a thing with us, was in itself an education amongst the Egyptians. Their alphabet consisted of nearly a thousand characters, involving different combinations. Chinese is the only language of to-day which approaches it in difficulty. And the art of writing was yet much more difficult. The system of hieroglyphics really meant that writing became drawing. Pictures were in place of letters. Rawlinson gives us a list of birds with the letters for which they stood. An eagle represented the letter *A*; an owl *M*; a chicken *U*; a duck *SA*; a hawk *HAR*; a vulture *MUT*; and there were also a swallow and an ibis. Many of us who can write legibly might be puzzled to draw an eagle, an owl, a duck, and a swallow, so that at a glance one should be quite sure what it was meant for. Not birds only, but beasts, insects, and flowers had to be drawn with a firm, sure hand, artistically and rapidly. As to arithmetic, it is said that we owe our multiplication table to the Egyptians, and geometry and science of measurement could not fail to flourish where every year the landmarks were swept away by the overflowing of the Nile. Of astronomy they knew much; and their colossal architecture testifies to their skill in mechanics. Rhythm and poetry were the common study of the schools. Of Moses' skill in this respect we have evidence in his "Song," and in the poem at the end of Deuteronomy, and in the ninetieth and perhaps the ninety-first psalm. Music and dancing were also arts which the Egyptians cultivated with skill and care, and it is noteworthy that the song and the dance first find a place in the Bible in connection with Moses. There is no music in Genesis. We hear of one who has a harp and an organ, but the instruments themselves we do not hear; there is neither poet nor song.

Law and medicine are also to be reckoned amongst the things in which the Egyptians were learned, and in which Moses was trained. Nor could any learning have been of more value to him when he came to occupy the position of leader and judge of Israel. The laws of Egypt were for the most part admirable, and they were administered by trained judges. Nor was the king himself able to set aside the authority of the law. Sanitary regulations were enforced throughout the land, and the study of medicine and chemistry was carried by them far beyond the attainment of other nations.

Thus was Moses trained and fitted for the high position to which God had called him: he was learned in all the learning of the Egyptians.

Later in life, and when he had finished with the schools, there came another training that completed the fitness as leader of Israel. Stephen speaks of Moses as "*mighty in words and in deeds*"—that he occupied a foremost position in the land both as a statesman and warrior, foremost in influencing the course of events both at home and abroad. To the high spirits and courage of this young prince, when as yet peace principles had not begun to be advocated, it is easy to believe that the soldier's life would have a peculiar charm. Every Egyptian monarch led out his army in person and himself fought at its head. And it seemed a fitting place for the son of Pharaoh's daughter. The military glory of Egypt had lately been increased by the great victories in Asia; and now in the war with Ethiopia, Moses found scope for his skill and courage.

Tradition, no doubt, has handed down to us what is merely fanciful as to his military career, but at the same time there is certainly much that confirms the words of Stephen. His

skill in marshalling the hosts of Israel, and in leading them through the Red Sea and the desert; in choosing the places of their encampment and in directing it, all this was doubtless largely the result of his life in the battlefield, from his twentieth to his fortieth year. Josephus gives us a romantic story that probably has some foundation, though it may be difficult to say what.

“The Ethiopians, neighbours of the Egyptians upon the south, were in the habit of making inroads into their territory, and ravaging it from time to time. After a while they provoked the Egyptians to retaliate, and the latter marched an army into the land of the Ethiopians, to punish them for their insolence. But the Ethiopians gathered their forces together, and engaging the Egyptians in the open field completely defeated them, slaughtering a vast number, and forcing the rest to make a hasty and disgraceful retreat into their own country. It was now the turn of the Ethiopians to take the offensive. Following up the flying foe they crossed the border, and not content with ravaging, proceeded to seize and occupy large portions of southern Egypt. The inhabitants did not venture on resistance; and little by little the invaders crept on towards the north, till they reached Memphis and even the Mediterranean coast, without a single city having held out against their attack. Reduced to the depths of despair the Egyptians had recourse to their oracular shrines, and inquired of them what it would be best to do. The reply given by the oracles—*i.e.*, by the priests who had the control of them—was: ‘Use the Hebrew as your helper.’ No one doubted that by ‘the Hebrew’ was meant Moses, or that the ‘help’ to be required of him was that he should take the conduct of the war. Moses accordingly was invested with the sole command, and at the head of the Egyptians troops he marched into the enemy’s country, by an importation of ibises got rid of the serpents that infested it, and defeated in a decisive battle the army that was sent against him. He then went on and took city by city, everywhere overcoming the resistance that was offered to him, and slaying large numbers of the enemy. His troops, whom their reverses had disheartened, took courage so soon as they found that their new general could lead them to victory, and showed themselves excellent soldiers, ready to endure alike toil and danger.”

“Omitting embellishments and exaggerations,” adds Professor Rawlinson, “Thus much we may accept,—that Moses did become the commander-in-chief of the Egyptian army at a very critical time in its history.”

Such then was the position and character of Moses when he was forty years of age. He has secured all that Egypt could give him,—the highest position, a kingly power, the confidence and admiration of the people, boundless honour and wealth, possibly the prospect of the throne itself, opportunities for culture and knowledge such as could not be found elsewhere in all the world.

Whilst Moses dwells in his position of such greatness, let us look for a moment at the condition of his brethren at this time. Away in the brickfields they toil in the day. The fierce sun smites them with its rays, and the fiercer taskmasters at once curse and beat these helpless slaves. Other companies drag the heavy burdens to the walls of the city, they too beaten and cursed. Others again are in the fields, toiling their lives away in anguish. Such is the lot of Israel, a people degraded by their slavery, until hope itself has died out and their very spirit is broken. Now turn again to look at this Moses as he stands in the palace of Pharaoh. The man whose very face and form proclaim at once the poet, the warrior, the lawgiver, the statesman, the judge,—dowered with all gifts. About him are the tokens of his high position. Every luxury waits to minister to him; every pleasure is within his reach; all the treasures of wealth and learning are his, the charms of culture and the delicacies of the court. The kingdoms of the world and the glory of them lie at his feet. He looks forth over the stately city with its wealth and proud people. He sees in the distance the pyramids, where in time he may be laid to rest with kings. And in that clear air does he see afar off a company of the toilers burdened and beaten? Does he hear the cry of the taskmaster,—and he knows that with the word comes the blow? Look at it. See him as he steps down from the palace, and follow him as he goes away outside the city walls to join himself to the misfortunes of his poor

brethren. "By faith Moses when he was come to years refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt."

Than this, earth has indeed no nobler story save one, and one only. There is another greater, sublimer,—the story of Him who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, whom the angels worshipped, by whom God made the heavens, King of kings, and Lord of lords. And lo! He looked upon us in our low estate, and for us men and for our salvation He who was rich became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. From an infinitely greater height did He come, and stooped to an infinitely greater depth, taking upon Himself the curse of our sin, that He might lead forth the redeemed of the Lord.

III.

THE FORTY YEARS IN MIDIAN

"... I have been a stranger in a strange land." —Exodus ii. 22

TO Moses there had doubtless been given some divine revelation of his call as the deliverer of his race. The faith spoken of in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews is in almost every case associated with such a revelation from heaven. He is now forty years of age, and if ever the deliverance of his people is to be accomplished the time is come. He is in the prime of his manhood. He has learned all that Egypt can teach him so as to be qualified for the work. Alike in mind and body he is at his best. The work is one which it may require years to accomplish. Now he will declare boldly what he is going to do. No more the son of Pharaoh's daughter, he is a Hebrew of the Hebrews. The blow shall be struck in the name of God that shall set his brethren free.

Look at him as he goes down into their midst! A lordly man was this Moses, fit for a throne—every inch a king. Handsome and noble in appearance, the eye flashing with indignation at the sight of the wrongs of Israel; his face proclaiming the great purpose which fills his soul, his tone and bearing catching the nobility of that achievement on which his heart is set, and to which he has given up everything. So comes this man into the midst of his brethren, The victorious warrior, Egypt's commander-in-chief, "a man mighty in words and deeds," he is not one to be trifled with, brooking no defiance, and ready fiercely enough to avenge every insult. This is not the meek Moses, but Moses the prince, Moses the soldier, Moses the judge and the ruler.

So to-day he goes forth eager to rouse the people to perceive that God would by his hand deliver Israel. He comes upon a little group where an Israelite, burdened by a load that crushed him, has stumbled. Pitilessly the Egyptian taskmaster rains upon him blows and curses. The indignation of Moses is kindled in an instant. He hurls back the Egyptian, and when in self-defence the Egyptian struggles, the young prince smites him and kills him, and thrusts the body beneath the sand. Leaving that to teach these Hebrews what he had come to do for them, Moses goes on his way. "Surely," he thinks within himself, "they shall discern such a sign of the times. These people are not to be beaten and enslaved—the people whom God hath made free. One is come who shall lead them forth into the land of their fathers."

He might well have looked that the elders of Israel should come to him as soon as this deed was whispered amongst them, and have spoken to him perhaps under cover of the night. But alas faith is a hard matter with slaves. The dreary drudgery had slain their very hope and trust, and left only fear. The next day Moses came again into their midst, came upon two of them that strove together. We see the prince, the natural lord and ruler of men, as he steps between them, thrusting them apart, and turning to one of them he asks "Wherefore dost thou smite thy fellow?" But there was no recognition of his position. There was no gratitude for the great sacrifice he had made for them. Of him, as of the greater than Moses, it was true—he was despised and rejected; he came unto his own, but his own received him not. Of him too was it true—neither did his brethren believe in him. Angrily the answer is flung at him, "What business is it of thine! Who made thee a judge and a ruler over us? Wilt thou kill me as thou didst kill the Egyptian yesterday?"

Think of this man whose soul is full of the great purpose of which he had dreamed, and for which he had set himself all the days of his life. Think of all the sublime visions dying instantly, melting into thin air. This was the people for whom he had sacrificed everything!

He turns away heavy-hearted. Shall he go back to the palace? That is impossible. Pharaoh has heard of his killing the Egyptian, and has discovered quickly enough, however blind the Hebrews may be, what his purpose is. Thus rejected of Israel he is persecuted by Pharaoh. His meddling has brought with it only failure. So it is that Moses turns and makes his escape, glad to leave behind him all sight of the land and wishing he could leave the memory of it too.

Except in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, I know of nothing in all history so unutterably pathetic as that flight. What does mother think? And Miriam, faithful Miriam, his sister? In this new sorrow does the brave mother's faith triumph still, and does she see him as she saw him long ago, standing on the sea of glass mingled with fire, singing the song of triumph—"Thou didst blow with Thy breath: Thy sea covered them: they sank like lead, like lead in the mighty waters?"

Like another Jacob he flies for his life, but a whole heaven above Jacob in the greatness of his soul. Think of him in that lonely flight, lying down at night in some hidden spot whilst the great stars come out overhead and look down on him, the prince of yesterday, accustomed to all honour and luxury, to-day hungry, homeless; and Pharaoh instead of being overthrown is seeking his life to take it away. His purposes not only lost, but ending in this! His hopes not only broken, but so bitterly and cruelly trampled under foot. All his great sacrifices not only of no avail, but bringing upon him such curse and misery. How now was Israel to be helped? Nowhere in all the stories of men is there anything to set beside this save in the story of the Lord from heaven. Following close on the strain and excitement of those days what dark questionings must have assailed him in this loneliness; what gloomy temptations; what mocking laughter seemed to ring about him?

For many a day he pursues his lonely course, left only to his own thoughts, amid the hardships and perils of the journey. Not a man like Elijah is this—used to hard fare and the scanty comforts of a cave; he comes from the palace, accustomed to the luxuries of a king.

At last he finds his way across the desert into the land of Sinai. How little he thinks that he should come that way again at the head of Israel's host, and on this very Sinai should take from the lips of God the great words which should shape the conscience of the ages and become the strength of the life of nations. He reaches the land of Ruel, priest and king of Midian, and there seats himself beside the well. Then come upon the scene the daughters of the king, according to the good custom of the land bred not in idleness, but trained as shepherdesses, and they hasten to fill the troughs of the sheep. And when the rude Bedouins would have driven the shepherdesses back, and have watered their own flocks first, this brave and gallant prince rose up for their protection, and helped them, and watered their flocks. The daughters carry to their father the tidings of this handsome stranger who had rendered such service, and he welcomed him as his guest, and after awhile he gave him his daughter Zipporah to wife. The name of the little son that is born to him has in it a sigh. He called the lad *Gershom*, for, said he, "I have been a stranger in a strange land."

For forty years he dwelt in this land as the shepherd. The life of Moses divides itself into three forties. Forty years he is in the palace of Pharaoh; forty years he is in Midian; and forty years he is the leader and lawgiver of Israel. It may be that these years were the very happiest of his life. "Happy is the nation whose annals are dull." To one thoughtful and trained in all the learning of the Egyptians this shepherd life may have been for body and mind and soul altogether the happiest.

Look at its effect upon the character of Moses. What a contrast there is between the man who goes into the desert and the man who comes out of it. We saw him step forth from the palace the judge and the ruler—the man born to command; and if he is not obeyed there is a sharp and ready method of dealing with the offender. Smite him, kill him if need be. A young hero this who will not stand any nonsense; and when his heart is on fire take care of yourself—he can shoot lightnings, forked and well-aimed. But his heart is saddened,—this fighting and smiting does not succeed. Then come the days of loneliness and disappointment softening him. This man must fail that he may succeed. Failure alone can fit such men for success. The life of the shepherd is gradually toning down the lordly ruler and making him more simple and brotherly. This communion with God in the solitudes has loosed him from himself. The very calling of the shepherd day after day has developed gentleness and kindly forethought and patience. He learns to walk slowly that the tired sheep may keep up with him. He stoops, he who was the fierce warrior, to lift the little lamb and carry it in his bosom. Day after day he thinks only of the panting flock, searching out the shade for them, and leading them where

they can lie down in the green pasture. So does this Moses come to be diffident, pitiful as a father, forbearing. So when God came to him with the great commission he has room for God, much room; he who was "mighty in deeds and in words" is afraid of himself. He is "not eloquent,"—who will heed him? Pharaoh will not hear him, nor Israel receive him. So Moses becomes the meekest of men. How? He has been to school. Where? In the wilderness. What for? That he may learn to lead the flock of God like a shepherd; that he may bear with them, and pity them, and be not only brave, but patient and gentle. So was he fitted for the great work that God had for him to do.

And then let us remember another great work which was probably accomplished at this time. Moses was not only called of God to make history, but to record that which was already made. He who was to be the leader of God's people was to tell how God had led them hitherto. We owe Moses much for the book of Exodus; we certainly do not owe him less for the book of Genesis. Now for this great achievement of his life there was probably no opportunity, either in the palace of Pharaoh, or in the long life as the leader of Israel; but here was the perfect condition for such a work. A revelation direct from heaven probably commenced it,—and as St. John was led away to the lonely Patmos that he might record the visions which were given him, so may it have been that Moses was led up into the wilderness that he might write that which he sees. Moses, the author of the book of Genesis, is doing as much service as Moses the hero of the book of Exodus. What will Exodus avail us unless Genesis comes first? We can only get into the second book of Moses through the first. And here is the man trained in all the learning of the Egyptians, at once the *seer* and the *scribe*. Ear and eye alike opened, head and hand alike skilful, that he may rightly see and rightly record that which God shall show him. And here is the opportunity, as if it were spoken in this solitude—"*What thou seest write in a book.*"

Shall we then pity Moses in the desert? Shall we talk of the strange and unmeaning discipline of life? There is the answer of God. It was that the ages might have the orderly record of the creation and the story of the beginning of His dealings with the nations. And to-day, standing upon the sea of glass, and having the harp of God, I can think that the song of Moses has a sweeter note and richer fulness because of these forty years in the wilderness of Midian.

For us there is the great truth if we will but receive it. The Heavenly Father knows the right school to send us to if we will but learn the lessons. God knows how to make the best of us if we will but let Him have His own way with us. Our only safety and blessedness is *to let Him have His own way with us perfectly.*

IV.

THE SECOND APPEARANCE AS THE DELIVERER

“Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people.” —Exodus iii. 10

AFTER the vision of God in the bush that burned with fire, Moses does not seem to have started at once for Egypt. We read in the nineteenth verse of the fourth chapter—“And the Lord said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt, for all the men are dead which sought thy life.” Now he seeks his father-in-law, the priest and king of Midian, and asks his consent. The meekness of Moses appears in the request. He has had the wonderful visions of God; he has had the great commission for the deliverance of Israel from the might of Egypt; he has been entrusted with the power of miracles; but nothing of this is referred to as the reason of his departure. “Let me go, I pray thee, and return to my brethren which are in Egypt, and see whether they be yet alive,”—this is all he asks. It may be that wisdom as well as lowliness made it possible.

Then he starts. His departure is marked by the same simplicity. The son of Pharaoh’s daughter no longer, he who was rich and for their sakes became poor, goes forth with all the tokens of poverty still. No doubt during these forty years in Midian he had obtained much wealth. There is no reason why we should not think of him as very rich in cattle and sheep and men-servants and maid-servants. But all unlike the return of Jacob from Laban is the departure of Moses from Midian. “And Moses took his wife and sons and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt.” The picture at once recalls another,—the flight into Egypt, when Joseph took the young Child and Mary His mother, and hastened from the cruel Herod. So Moses goes forth on his errand to spoil the Egyptians and to lead his people up into a goodly land flowing with milk and honey. It was a strange sight: going in such a lowly fashion to accomplish so great a triumph. Look at the faithful Moses trudging through the desert beside the ass on which was seated his wife and her little sons. Think again of the magnificence of Egypt: glance at its pride and splendour, that sense of massive and solid power which its architecture seems to embody, its hosts of horsemen and chariots, its cruel taskmasters. Did not the tempter meet the man of God in the wilderness mocking him, “What doth this feeble Jew?” A deliverer of Israel;—where is the prancing horse, where the armed men keeping rank, the wealth of gold and jewels, the host enthusiastic and defiant. Hell’s horrid laughter might well have rung out upon that silence. Here in this great stretch of sandy waste, amid the quivering air and in the fierce heat, goes this little group; an old man trudges wearily beside the ass on which is seated his wife and two little sons. No sign cheers him on his way. Look at it. Thus by faith Moses went forth to the overthrow of Pharaoh and for the triumph of Israel.

On the way Moses is overtaken by a serious illness. It is written, *The Lord sought to kill Moses.*” What does it mean? Jehovah, the God of Israel, has come down to command Moses to go forth on an errand taxing to the uttermost his faith and skill and courage. He sets out laying aside every weight and all that could hinder him. And lo, the next thing we read is that *the Lord sought to kill him.* Is that the recompense of the reward? Is that the result of obedience?

Let us look into it, for here we may notice another difficulty, about the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. There is the same suggestion of injustice in the record as it stands. That God should send Moses commanding Pharaoh to let Israel go, and then that he should harden Pharaoh’s heart, so that he should refuse to let the people go! That he should keep smiting him with plague and pestilence and yet keep making him stubborn and defiant! This assuredly is not the God whom we have learnt to call our Father. Who of us could worship such a God, much less trust or love Him? It were to honour the true God more to build our altars to an unknown God.

So then it is written, "the Lord sought to kill Moses"; what it means probably is that he was overtaken by some malady that threatened to prove fatal.

This word of God is given to us like all Scripture by the inspiration of God. But inspiration does not destroy the ordinary methods of human thought and speech, or it would be wholly unintelligible. If the mind of God is to be made known in human speech it must be subject to the defects and limits of human speech, exactly as in choosing human agents and human instruments God takes men with all their natural defect and ignorance. It is often said that there is not a single Scripture character save the Lord Jesus Himself of whom no fault is recorded. It is not quite true, for of Joseph and Nehemiah and Daniel we do not find any fault. But broadly speaking it is true; and of course we all know that only in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ was the human life lived without sin. Now so is it that in making use of our human language God accepts it not only with the defective use of words, but with the imperfect and mistaken methods of thought which underlie the words. The sun rising and setting, the sun standing still, the corners of the earth,—what a stumbling-block such phrases must have been to sincere souls when science began to show that the world was not flat and had no corners, that the sun did not rise and set. It does not trouble us to-day, because in this matter we see how the Bible has accepted and used the popular speech and thought on these matters. Now think of a time and of a people to whom everything was a kind of fate, when free-will and the power of man to control circumstances was a thing unrecognised and unknown; when the simplest way to explain anything was that God did it, or the devil did it,—that if a man were sick God met him and sought to kill him, and if a man were obstinate and stubborn that God hardened his heart. To-day human nature is the same as it was in Egypt and Israel, and God deals with men now as He dealt with them then. But to-day if a man is obstinate and defiant we do not say that God made him what he is. Thus as we have said, in choosing human language as the vehicle of Revelation, it could be only with the limits and defects and methods of human speech. To-day amongst those Eastern nations the same notion lingers. "Why hurry? If you are to get there you will: if not, you won't. It is fated, decreed." But we say, "If you don't make haste you will miss the train," and blame the man, not fate, if he loiters and loses it.

The sickness of Moses sickness of Moses leads him to reflection, perhaps such as the greatness of his commission had somewhat interrupted or prevented. He remembers that the commandment of God in reference to his sons has been overlooked and delayed,—possibly in deference to his wife's wishes, and now he directs her as to the fulfilment of this ceremony. She obeys, but ungraciously, rebelliously, and in angry scorn of her husband. Then Moses perceives that the errand on which he goes is one that will be better accomplished without the presence of his wife and children. He finds an opportunity of sending them back to the protection of his father-in-law, and he goes on alone.

Eagerly now would he begin to look for the coming of his brother, who is to be associated with him in this work and to whom a message had been given to go into the Mount of God and meet Moses. At last came the moment when these brothers met—they who had not seen each other for forty years. Each of them is now an old man and each is deeply impressed by the solemnity of the high work to which he is called. They would have much to tell of family matters, of the life in Midian, of the wife and sons, of the recent narrow escape from death, and most of all of the vision of the burning bush, and of the words of the Lord. Aaron's story would be chiefly of the sorrows of Israel and of the new king and of the condition of Egypt;—never was the outlook darker; never was hope less. So do these brothers set out together, the first of that long line of united leadership in the Church where mutual sympathy and effort have so often proved that two may be much more than twice one. Thrown together now for the first time, they are to be henceforth not only fellow-workers, but united in heart and soul for forty years in that great work to which they have been called.

Carefully arranging their plans as they come, Moses and Aaron continue their journey to Egypt. They call together the heads of the people, the hereditary chiefs of the family. In Oriental countries an alien race dwelling amongst the ruling nation is almost always

permitted to have its chiefs or head-men, who control it, act on its behalf, and are the means of communication between it and the government.

It is easy to think with what eagerness of expectation they would gather in some secluded district where their coming together would be least exposed to observation. Still more would expectation be kindled within them when they hear the message which the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has sent to them. He had seen their affliction. He had come down to deliver them out of the hand of Pharaoh. They were to be prepared for the refusal of Pharaoh and his angry scorn of this proposal. But God should smite Egypt with wonders and then let them go, and enriched and adorned with the jewels of Egypt should Israel march forth to the goodly land flowing with milk and honey. Then Moses went on to show them the signs by which they were to know that he came from God, the appointed proofs and credentials of his authority. It seemed like the beginnings of their deliverance. The people believed, and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked upon their afflictions then they bowed their heads and worshipped.

“*Afterwards*,” as it is written—with what interval we do not know,—Moses and Aaron went on their solemn and important mission before Pharaoh. They are described as both venerable men—Moses retaining much of the beauty which was so marked a feature of his early life, of whom it is recorded many years later that his eye was not dimmed nor his natural force abated. He is described as tall and dignified, with long streaming hair of a reddish hue and long shaggy beard.

It was a daring thing for these two men to present themselves at all in the presence of Pharaoh, and yet much more so on this errand. A man weak and capricious, arrogant, passionate, and cruel, he set himself on a level with the divinities of Egypt: took their titles to himself. He was the *Living One*—the *Giver of Life*—the *Gracious Lord*—the *Good God*. And here before this haughty monarch in the midst of his courtiers came the representative of these slaves with their demand. Brief and direct was the message they utter, peremptory almost and little in keeping with such language as Pharaoh alike demanded and received. “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel—Let My people go that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness.”

Astonished at this audacity Pharaoh haughtily answered: “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go. I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go—”

The demand is repeated in the same tone, as of men who had seen the Living God and heard His voice. “The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days’ journey into the desert and sacrifice unto the Lord our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence and the sword.”

Indignant at this proposal Pharaoh turns upon him angrily, “What do you mean by hindering the people from their work? Be gone to your burdens.” And thus they were driven from the face of the king.

This was bad enough; but worse was to follow, much worse. No penalties fell upon Pharaoh. The mighty wonders which were spoken of did not come. In all his pride and splendour he sat daily plotting more miseries for the helpless children of Israel. Calling together his servants who were set over the people he commanded them, “Ye shall no more give the people straw to make bricks as before: let them go and gather for themselves. Yet the number of bricks ye shall not in any wise lessen: for they be idle. And therefore do they say: Let us go and sacrifice unto our God.”

This was a very heavy punishment to inflict upon the Hebrews. Many of them had to go and gather the straw from the fields, whilst the others were beaten unless they made up the full number of bricks. As all the straw was gathered that could be found near to the slime-pits they would have to go farther afield, and so the evil was perpetually increasing. Day by day this toil was greater, and yet the punishment increased for the taskmasters beat them with sticks. Little wonder that the people of Israel turned angrily upon Moses and Aaron, and flung it in their teeth. “Ye have made us to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hands to kill us.”

Think of Elijah, stern Elijah flying from the face of Jezebel: sitting down under the juniper-tree and praying that he might die. If Jezebel lived and triumphed what good was life to him? What of his toils and perils if after all this woman was to sit and plot against the God of Israel and His people? So sad, so bewildered, so cast down is Moses as he comes before the Lord. But fierce Elijah ran away *from* God. Moses ran away *to* God and poured out his sorrow before Him. “Lord, wherefore hast Thou so evil entreated this people? *Why is it that Thou has sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh he hath done evil to the people. Neither hast Thou delivered Thy people at all.*”

We can understand what a bitter trial it was. To have the scornful upbraiding flung at them from the lips of those whom they had been sent to deliver. To find a place of the triumph they had expected, such cruel failure, such added misery. So Moses, cast down and disquieted, goes to pour out his complaint before God. The language of the forty-second Psalm might well have been his,—“I will say unto God my Rock, why hast Thou forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones my enemies reproach me, while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?”

Note well the answer to this depression. It is very beautiful. It is an illustration to the text, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him, for He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust.”

“Then the Lord said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh, for with a strong hand shall he let them go and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land. . . . And I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”

God is never angry with us for doubting, or being depressed if our doubts and depressions do by *drive us to Him*. The only sorrow we have to fear is the sorrow that drives us from God.

SERVICE

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon." —MATT. vi. 24

"Let My people go, that they may serve Me." —Ex. viii. 1.

THE people of Israel were out of their place. Nothing could be more widely different than where they were and where God would have them. Where they ought to be was Canaan,—the land of hills and valleys, the goodly land arched by a sky of deepest blue shaded and softened by the fleecy clouds, with swelling hills, and plans along which the shepherd leads his flock. Then dipping steeply towards the valley are the terraced vineyards with the luscious meadows where the cattle stand knee-deep in pasture, and the willows fringe the water-courses. Half-hidden in the leafy shelter stands the pleasant homestead; the busy master moves amongst the reapers where they bend over the corn. The hired servants have bread enough and to spare. The laugh of merry children and the chant of the psalm ring out upon the still air. And yonder in the distance are the towers of the Holy City, the place of their solemnities whither they go up to wait upon the Lord. Look upon the picture and read beneath it the title,—*"Happy art thou, O Israel,—who is like unto thee, O people saved of the Lord?"*

That is where the Lord would have His people, and whither He will lead them.

But where are they? No grassy meadows,—no fruitful valleys,—no happy laughter theirs. A sky of brass whence beats a pitiless heat; a dreary waste,—and in the fierce blaze of the sun a company of toiling slaves, bound and dragging at the burdens. Beside them the taskmaster savagely string at one and another. And yonder are the brick-makers in a very furnace of affliction,—they too beaten and abused,—their life a round of cruelty and hopeless toil. The Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour.

It is from the one scene to the other that God would lead His people. *"Let My people go, that they may serve Me."*

Now the difference between Egypt and Canaan is intended to illustrate what is meant by coming *"out of the world."* The word *world* has come to mean something rather sanctimonious and old-fashioned—something very dreadful, but why, or what it is, one does not quite know. Certainly Canaan was as much in the world as Egypt was. The same heaven shut them in, the same sun shone upon both. In Canaan as in Egypt people had to eat and drink, and eating and drinking meant forethought and work and arrangement. In Canaan as in Egypt they must make bricks and hew stones if they were to have houses to live in. Why then talk about some part of it as *"the world?"*

Well, the difference between Canaan and Egypt sets forth as in a picture exactly the difference between what the Bible calls the children of this world and the children of God. Egypt was the land *that knew not God*. "I know not the Lord" (Ex. v. 2) is the language of Pharaoh. The very physical conditions of the two lands exactly expressed the difference. The land of Egypt was a land where they *looked down* for everything; the land of Canaan was the land where they *looked up* for everything. The river Nile, which they worshipped as their god, was the very life and sustenance of the land. It was that upon which they depended for their wealth and their national prosperity. The Nile diverted meant Egypt becoming an uninhabitable desert. Their very bread came from the Nile. In the dream of Pharaoh, by which was foretold the years of plenty and the years of famine, it was *up out of the river* that there came the seven kine well-favoured, and it was *up out of the river* that there came the seven kine ill-favoured and lean-fleshed. The overflowing of the Nile meant prosperity the lack of this meant famine. So was Egypt the land where man looked down instead of up.

But Canaan was the land where the hills stretched away to heaven, and the soft clouds gathered about their summits and poured their wealth into the land. It was vividly pictured by the psalmist, in words that present the contrast very sharply.

"Thou visitest the earth and waterest it: Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God which is full of water. Thou preparest them corn when Thou hast so provided for it. Thou

waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: Thou settlest the furrows thereof: Thou makest it soft with showers: Thou blesses the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness: and Thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness and the hills are girded with joy. [R.V.]—The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing” (Psalm lxxv. 9-13).

The difference is not either fanciful or accident. It is pointed out by God Himself as the characteristic of the land to which they are going. “For the land whither thou goest to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed and wateredst it with thy foot, (either the foot wheel that filled the sluice: or the carrying water from the river)—as a garden if herbs: but the land whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: a land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year” (Deut. xi. 10).

So then Egypt is a picture of what the Bible means by “the world”; where they know not God: where they *looked down* for all instead of *looking up*. In order that they might serve God, His people must be brought from the one land to the other,—the land of course typifying and illustrating an inner spirit.

“*That ye may know that I am the Lord,*” is the keynote to the book of Exodus. No less than seventeen times it is repeated in the book,—“that ye may know that I am the Lord.” Israel is hemmed in by difficulties innumerable and beyond all human help: they are delivered by manifestations of an Almighty Power; they are led up into a great and terrible wilderness where neither bread nor water is, that they may learn to look up to God for everything.

Then again Egypt is a picture of the world,—*as it is without God so it is without hope*. As men look down for everything so they are shut in by the little patch of earth upon which their eyes fall. He who looks up sees a whole heaven; he who looks down sees little but his own shadow. That is the world, it is the tyranny of the seen blinding men to the unseen; it is the tyranny of the present shutting men back from the eternal.

In the life of Abraham, the father and founder of Israel, have you noticed this *look-up*? “Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked.” “Look now toward heaven,” said God. And the author of the epistle to the Hebrews seems to see the man of God with that far away upward look. He dwells in a tent, declaring himself a pilgrim and a sojourner; the abiding place is not here, but he looks away and upward to find it, away to a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. He looks afar off and sees the day of Christ and is glad. He walks the earth ennobled by that kinship to the world’s Messiah. Thought, desire, hope, are loosed from the little to-day with its narrow bounds and are uplifted and set upon God,—his shield and his exceeding great reward. And now where are the children of Abraham? Here in Egypt, blind and deaf and dead to all their high calling; with that glorious picture all faded out of their thoughts. All through the fierce day they must grind in their bondage, and then they turn to their onions and leeks and garlick and cucumbers. Without God and without hope in the world, mere beasts of burden, getting through their dreary toil and then eager only for enough to eat.

And this is Egypt still, a land of bondage where God is not known, where to talk of God is to move a stare of wonder or a scornful laugh. “The Lord helps those who help themselves,—that is our gospel, sir. Push and tact are the Providence of these times. *What pays* is the only matter we have to see to. That decides what you ought to do and what you ought to leave undone. Talk about generosity, unselfishness, a desire to help other people as much as ourselves—No sir, it is a pretty sentiment: but it won’t *pay*, it really won’t.”

“And what if it doesn’t pay?” says an angel, innocently, “Is that everything?”

Then the world sighs pitifully. There is but one real heresy and that is the heresy for which Paul and Silas suffered so much; it interfered with the hope of men’s gains. “Really, sir, you don’t understand business,” says the world scornfully. And if business is that which shuts out God, and which takes a mean advantage of one’s neighbour, I think the angel straightway sings a new song of praise that he does not.

“Let My people go that they may serve Me.” Canaan is the place of God’s service, the land where God’s Presence dwells. Where the heart is set free for Him and His commandments; where the fear of the Lord is before the eyes; where the trust is in Him and where His blessing rests; where wife and family and household, where the very ox and the ass are shut in and blessed by His care and guarded by the majesty of His law. “The eyes of the Lord are always upon it and the Lord careth for it from the beginning of the year unto the end of the year.”

It is a land where love and goodness and truth are more than gold, are indeed the only true gold; where the people are bound by a great and glorious promise to the hope of a Prince and Saviour and are knit thereby into a true brotherhood. Life in Egypt is always a bondage and a toil: a thing from which we want to escape but can find no deliverance,—a weariness and a despair. But life in Canaan is a glad freedom, a blessed safety, a restful communion, an uplifting triumph.

Do not think of Canaan as the *reward* of service or the rest from service; it is the *place of service*. It is not a type of Heaven; a distant blessedness beyond this world. It is our place of service *here and now, in this world*. “When ye come into the land whither the Lord shall bring you” is the constant preface to the commandments and services which they are to observe. A man must get there *before* he can serve God. And he can get there only by the help and guidance of God. But if he give himself up to God, assuredly he shall reach that land, the land where God is a living Presence, a gracious and loving Father controlling the whole life, ordering all our affairs; a land where all the life is blessed with the safety of His care, encompassed with favour as with a shield, and glad with the steady glow of a blessed future. *“Let My people go that they may serve Me;”* let us hear His call and rise up to respond to it with all our hearts. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the children of God.”

VI.

SERVICE

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Let My people go, that they may serve Me.” —Exodus viii. 1.

LET us turn aside somewhat from the story of Moses to consider here the purpose of God in dealing thus with Israel. “This people have I formed for Myself, they shall show forth My praise,” saith He. They were to be entrusted with the revelation of His will and word. Through them God would make Himself known to the world.

And further their very history was to illustrate God’s method of dealing with His people. Here were to be unfolded the great principles and purposes of God in relation to the lives of all them that are His.

Who then are these whom God calls *My people*? Are not all people His, to hear Him and to obey? Must not all men render their account to Him?

My people! We can think that haughty Egypt heard it and laughed aloud—“What, these wretched creatures that dare not call their lives their own! These slaves the chosen favourites of Heaven! No, no. If the gods care for any it is for kings, and for mighty men of valour, for the learned and the great. The mighty Pharaoh with his pomp and his palaces, and this proud nation—we are they in whom the gods delight.”

My people! We can think the Israelite heard it and sighed—“Ah, if only I were one of them—alas, it is not for me to think of such a boast and blessedness.” We see the poor slave stand for a moment, lifting the lean and bruised body in the fierce heat of the sun; the fetter chafes his wrist; and now the taskmaster’s whip falls upon his shoulders with a curse, “Ye are idle—ye are idle.” One of His people indeed! And sighing bitterly the Israelite turns to his burden. Blessed be God---He is not ashamed of His poor children. Ashamed! It is almost blasphemy to put it so far from the truth. No indeed, He stoopeth lowest for those that are lowest down. He cometh most gloriously for those that are the neediest. Never in the whole history of the world did He reveal Himself with such pomp and majesty as for these poor slaves. Of these it is that the word is spoken—*Let My people go that they may serve Me.*

WHO ARE THESE WHOM GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE?

They are a distinct and separate race. The blood of Abraham flows in their veins. To their father it is spoken—“In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed,” and henceforth this people is to be distinct and peculiar, a people whom the Lord hath set apart for Himself. This and this only determines who are the people of God. *It is a matter of birth.* This one thing marks them off from all others—their ancestry. The people of God are not those who agree with each other as to certain theories—in these things they may be sundered far as the poles. It is not that they come together on certain particular occasions and observe the same ceremonies. No ceremonies, however ancient, however solemn, however significant, however faithfully observed, can make them His people. The distinction is one of birth. It is a difference of nature. Born of God, begotten of God, they are the children of God. Within them is the very Spirit of God whereby they cry *Abba, Father*. By ties of closest and tenderest relationship they are bound to Him and He to them. Upon them He hath bestowed such manner of love that they are called the children of God; and He is their Heavenly Father. All their life is sacredly dear to Him; and all their way is under His guidance and tender care. These are His people. Greatness, wisdom, honour, do not make our claim upon Him; neither can poverty, nor wretchedness unmake that claim. It is in no wise dependent upon our circumstances, since it is only and wholly a matter of birth.

Nor is this all. His people are created of God *by a distinct and wholly supernatural act.* They are the children of a new life—the children of the resurrection. There was another son of Abraham, who for Abraham’s sake was dear to God; upon whom was the sign and seal of the Covenant; but the descendants of Ishmael were not those whom God called “My people.” It was only when Abraham and Sarah are “as good as dead”—we should have said “as bad as dead,” but they are no good to God until they are dead—that Isaac is born, the child of laughter—the heir of the promise; through

him it is that they are a peculiar people, unlike any other race or nation—separate, distinct, begotten of God. This it is which makes us *His people*. No church relationship can suffice: no external observance. These may declare His people, but they cannot *constitute* them such. Circumcision did not make them children of Abraham—it only declared them to be such. These and these only are His people—*they who are born of God; begotten through faith in Him who is the true Isaac, by the power of His resurrection*. “As many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God: even to them that believe on His name: which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

And out of that relationship to God come a thousand new relationships. There is a new *authority* which is ever supreme. There is a new *nature*, with new hopes, and new desires, and new needs, and new aspirations, and new delights;—a nature which can find its only satisfaction in Him in Whom it found its source. There is a new relationship to all things. Born of God, they look farther; they soar higher; they find more. The narrow present is merged into the everlasting; the opinions of others give place to the will of God: the claims and attractions of the world are checked and dulled by the glories of the Heavenly. His people hear and understand and respond to a voice that saith—*Let My people go that they may serve Me*.

BUT IF THESE ARE HIS PEOPLE, WHY DOES HE SUFFER THEM TO BE HERE?

Come, see the people of God, His chosen ones, whom He hath promised to make into a great nation. They are toiling slaves; oppressed and beaten, ground down by cruelty, their children slain; themselves kept alive only as hopeless, helpless beasts of burden; subject to the heathen, reproached by the haughty scorn of the Egyptians as they say continually—*Where is now thy God?* Forsaken, wronged,—has God forgotten to be gracious? Who shall deliver them out of the hand of Pharaoh?

That they may know that I am the Lord—this is the key to it all. They are hemmed in by all possible evils in Egypt, that they may see the greatness and might of their God in their deliverance. They are led into the wilderness where there is neither bread nor water, that they may learn to look up to God for their help. If the choice were ours, what should we choose for the people of God? Recall the history of Israel in the land of Goshen—a people growing rapidly in numbers and in wealth,—and like all prosperous people, having the favour of those about them, and daily becoming more one with the Egyptians. They are at home in the land: contented with their circumstances, and forgetful of their origin, of their high calling, and their great destiny. What have they to do with Canaan, whence they had been driven by famine! What think you—that this is the truest blessedness for the people of God? Is this what you would choose for them?

If they are ever to become the great nation that God purposed, they must be led out of Egypt, and they must know God. As the massive palace needs to have its foundations dug out of the earth—the very rock must be blasted, and the walls go down deep upon the solid ground, so God would find the foundations for this great nation. Do you not see how as soon as they began to be afflicted, they began to be marked off from Egypt? The friends of their prosperity fell away from them like the leaves from the tree when winter frosts touch it and winter winds blow. Their wrongs drove them together: the fire that played upon them melted them into one, with a unity that they could only have known thus; and the strokes of the taskmaster welded and riveted them together.

And now in their anguish they begin to think of the God of their fathers. The stars of the promise shine in this gloom. Hopes and memories that were lightly forgotten, now once more are recalled and treasured. Had not the God of Abraham spoken great things concerning them? Were they not to go up to the goodly land flowing with milk and honey? So their cry rose up to the God of Heaven and their God came down for their deliverance.

That they may know that I am the Lord—that is the key to all the mystery—if we did but know it, that is the key to all the life of His people. See how the accumulated wrongs and ills of Egypt wrought into Israel the need of God; and gave to God the opportunity for the manifestation of His glorious Power! The mightier the nation that oppressed them, the greater

the glory of their deliverance. The more hopeless their condition, and the more hopeless the people, so much more room was there for God to show forth His mighty arm. So is it that Moses comes to the haughty Pharaoh—"Let My people go that they may serve me." Then as he refuses there follow one after another the miracles, humbling Egypt to utter helplessness, and making Israel more and more confident of deliverance, until at last, with the first-born dead in every house, the terror-stricken people of Egypt rise up and bade them be gone.

And then, amidst glories and wonders manifold, God led forth His people across the Red Sea, and brought them safely to the other side, whilst the proud Pharaoh and his host sank like lead in the mighty waters. And that day, as Israel stood upon the shore of the Red Sea—a sea of glass mingled with fire—and as Miriam took the timbrel and led the songs of His people, "Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea"—then, all knew how glorious a thing it is to belong to the people of God.

Look at it all. Which think you is better—the life of ease, of indolence, of self-indulgence,—or the life in which we learn to see the greatness and the glory and the goodness of God? This is life eternal, to know Thee and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.

The greatness of life:—its breadth and depth, its expanse like heaven above us,—its solidity like the earth beneath us,—is exactly according to our knowledge of our God. And the deep peace and rest—the blessedness and satisfaction—these too come only from knowing Him.

We are most indebted, not to those things for which it is easiest to give thanks, but to those from which we have shrunk, and which set us wondering, fearing, perhaps even doubting. The reaper is a happy man, and poets sing and artists paint the scene of harvest home. But the keen frosts that break the clods, and the patient ploughman plodding wearily behind the share with which he cleaves the soil in chill winter winds and under cheerless skies—these are apt to be forgotten and unthanked. And yet what should the reaper bring if the ploughman went not forth? *My people*. God sends them to school that they may learn to know Him.

Learn further *that wherever His people are led, they can never get where God cannot help them*. Be sure of that. Whatever clouds gather they cannot hide His child in the darkness. No circumstances can ever shut us out from His help.

Come and look into this lowly dwelling-place of the Hebrews. See here the mother bending over her little one, against whom has gone forth the cruel decree of death. The eyes are blinded with tears, the heart bursts with grief—the child is pressed passionately to her lips. Hath God forgotten His people? Is the enemy for ever to triumph? Fear not. This little child shall lead Israel forth. This very Pharaoh who hath decreed his death shall secure his life. The palace of the king shall be his home; the might of Egypt shall compass him with safety, and the wealth of Egypt shall be at his service.

My people. The Lord knoweth them that are His. He leadeth them in a way that they know not, but He knoweth the way. Fear not: we too may sing: "He leadeth us in a right way to bring us to a city of habitation."

Notice yet another characteristic of His people.

See Israel come forth from Egypt. Every man, every woman, every child bows his head beneath a doorpost on which is sprinkled the blood—each one passes between the side posts whereon is the crimson stain. They are the redeemed of the Lord—*My people*,—ransomed by a great price.

The people of God find their deliverance in the power of the Cross. Ponder carefully the words of St. John in connection with these marks of those whom God calls *My people*. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John v. 4).

By the Cross of Christ is it that the world is crucified unto us, and we are crucified unto the world. There is no way out of the world but that by which Israel went—by the way of the

redeeming Blood—underneath the Cross of Christ. The only power that can loose us from the tyranny of the world and keep us free—the only power that can constrain the constant and glad service of God, is the power of that new life which is ours by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

So then if we would hear this voice, and be freed for service, our way is very plain—none need err therein. *Let there be the daily surrender of ourselves to Him.* We are His---His people, to be led by Him, and to know Him in all the round of the daily life—to find Him and to please Him in all our work. Let that be the supreme aim and end of our being. Set the will over on His side. Gather the desires and purposes into His presence. The fierceness of our self-will and the over-eagerness are withered and destroyed by submission to Him. He who made us alone can adjust rightly the subtle self towards all things, and He alone can keep the delicate balance of the heart. We need daily to be wound up, and daily to be set right. Gather about yourself the assurance of His tender care as the atmosphere in which you live and have your being; put the hand in His to be led of Him, and look forth upon the world as the place of your discipline and service, and the opportunity for knowing Him. Seek a clear spiritual perception. A right motive in all things is the secret of a quick ear and a clear vision. In Jesus Christ, our glorious Captain and Leader, expect and claim the power of a prompt and complete obedience. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God.” Given up for guidance and keeping at His side be assured that we shall find ourselves led within that goodly land that floweth with milk and honey—the land where all is blest with His presence and bright with His favour; where all is made glad by His service. The Power that wrought these wondrous works for Israel is ever available for our deliverance; therefore let us surrender ourselves wholly to Him. This is the will and purpose of our God, and up to this do the great promises of His love lead us. *“Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world according to the will of God and our Father.”*

VII.

HALF-WAY HOUSES

"Let My people go, that they may serve Me." —EXODUS viii. 1.

"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." —St. MATT. vii. 24.

WE have seen in these words a picture and parable of the world, the place in which the people were, and the place in which God would have them for service. We have seen His people, who and what they are. The next part of the story brings us to what the world says of these proposals. The subject is *half-way houses*: compromises: halting places: where dwells Mr. Facing-both-ways and his kith and kin.

In reply to the challenge of the Most High, Pharaoh makes four proposals. The first is in the twenty-fifth verse of this chapter. *"And Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land."*

The second proposal is in the twenty-eighth verse, *"And Pharaoh said, I will let you go that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness: only ye shall not go very far away."*

The third proposal is in the tenth chapter and in the eighth verse. *"And Moses and Aaron were brought again unto Pharaoh, and he said unto them, Go, serve the Lord your God: but who are they that shall go? And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds will we go, for we must hold a feast unto the Lord. And he said unto them, Let the Lord be so with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones: Look to it, for evil is before you. Not so: go now, ye that are men and serve the Lord:—and they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence."*

The fourth and last proposal is in the twenty-fourth verse. *"And Pharaoh called unto Moses and said, Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones go with you."*

It is a picture of the world and its proposals. Let us look at them.

Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land.

It was an impudent proposal. Go, sacrifice to your God in the land. Whose land? Pharaoh's—their master: Go, as my slaves and worship your God. Pharaoh did not think of it as *service*! of course it would have been impossible. They were *his* servants, but they might go and sacrifice to their God—their strength and toil was for him, they must make his bricks and build his cities and be at the beck and bidding of heathen taskmasters, but they might go and offer an occasional sacrifice to their God! Pharaoh's idea of religion is the commonest to-day. Religion is not *the service* of God. It is not that which demands all the mind and heart and soul and strength—it is just a matter of opinion: a set of notions. "It does not matter much after all"—Pharaoh seems to say—"if you think your God is better than our gods, well go, and worship Him,—only make haste back to your work. It is not worth fighting about." That is exactly the world's estimate of it. Religion is just a matter of theory and form. Some prefer this place and some the other; some think this form the only right one, and some run to the other; some call themselves by one name, and some by another. It is natural perhaps that people should prefer to do as their fathers did before them in these matters. Go then, and sacrifice to your God in the land.

There is another form of this Pharaohism, as we may call it. If possible it is worse than that blank formalism because it is more utterly selfish. A religion which is not a great surrender of ourselves to God for His service and for obedience to Him, but is just a coming to Him for what we can get, not for what we can give. Many people must have a little religious service. Just as men quiet a noisy dog with a bone they try in this way to quiet an uneasy conscience. It balances the account and sets things right. Sin if you must; and then go to the service and pray. Grind, and cheat, and make your money, and then give a subscription to some good cause.

Be not deceived. God is not mocked. His demand is—*Let My people go that they may serve Me—serve Me*. It is the word used of Pharaoh. He made Israel *to serve with rigour*. It was indeed an impudent proposal. “We are called to *serve* God, Pharaoh. If we are your servants, what think you it means? That we may come now and then and bow down before you and cry ‘Great is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and we are his people’; and then are we to go down to make bricks for another king and to build the city of one who defies you. No, no. We know what your service means. And our God saith—*Let My people go that they may serve Me*.” That and that only is the religion of this world—*serving God*. Not creeds; not theories; but a life in which every power and faculty is surrendered to Him for His service. God’s standard of service is not poorer or lower than the world’s, and the world scorns the man who is content with this sort of religion.

Look at the answer of Moses. “It is not meet so to do: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us?” It would be a twofold abomination—an abomination to God if they should offer Egyptian sacrifices, and an abomination to Egypt should they offer these to the God of Israel. In either case it would shock and offend the Egyptians—and they will stone us. The world has this amount of honesty in it: it does expect a man to be consistent. If a man goes so far as to kneel down and acknowledge God as the Lord, it does expect that he should get up and serve Him. The world has always got a stone ready for those who turn and dodge and try to make what they call the best of both worlds. The man who sighs piously and talks sweetly—and yet is the very slave of the world; toiling in its slime pits and brick kilns, fretting over its losses as much as anybody else, gloating over its gains like a very miser; able to whittle and shape the truth to fit his convenience; to shift and dodge for gain; to take advantage of his neighbour; and then he gives his subscription with a smirk of satisfaction; and goes and sings of the “realms of the blest,”—what, think you God is mocked by such deceivers? I tell you God cannot and will not endure them. “I will spew them out of My mouth.” And the world shall scorn them and stone them with its ridicule. “He a religious man! He set up for a Christian! He indeed! We do not know much about it, but we know too much for that!” Sir, neither God, nor man, nor devil, will ever be imposed upon by so palpable a sham. Think you God is flattered and pleased by your occasional recognition of Him as the Lord? Why, it is to provoke Him, as the heathen Egyptians could not provoke Him. To bow before Him as the Lord, and yet to live in defiance of His commandment! To kneel at His feet; and yet to go forth and serve His enemies! To hear of His love; and yet to live to ourselves! To hear of eternity and the dread realities of the judgment; and yet to live as if the present were all, and as if gold were the only good! You cannot limit the Almighty to days and places: you cannot blind Him to *other* days, and *other* ways, and *other* places. He knows the *heart*: He deals with the will: He demands the surrender of the whole man, the service of the whole life. This is His challenge. *Let My people go that they may serve Me*. Religion is His *service* or it is a mockery.

“*Ye shall not go very far away*,” said Pharaoh.

Make a little visit to God as you think duty may require, and then come back again. Do not go to any extreme. Do not go far away.

Look at the answer of Moses. *We will go three days’ journey*. That far we must go if we would begin the service of God. Short of that they were Pharaoh’s slaves, not God’s servants. Three days’ journey—the death, the grave, and the resurrection lie within the compass of those three days. The sea of destruction down into which they went as into the grave; up on the other side into the freedom and blessedness of the goodly land; then burst their first note of praise, and then rang out their rapturous triumph. That three days’ journey is ever the distance that must sever us from the world—the Cross, the grave, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the great separation.

Well, go you men, but leave your wives and little ones. Go indeed: God forbid! The God of the families of the whole earth claims the whole family—we will go every one of us.

Well, go then. But leave your cattle and sheep. No indeed, said Moses, we want them to sacrifice to the Lord our God. We will not leave a hoof behind.

Now what we have to learn is this, that there is only one service of God possible, and that is the thorough, whole-hearted, out and out service for Him which reaches to everything. Service that is not for God is service of that which sets itself up as His rival and enemy. One of two masters man must have—God or Mammon. That is the necessity of his very nature. Man is marked off from all other creatures not only by a consciousness of his need. He is the only creature on the face of the earth who has a future, and he lives in the future more than in the past. It is what is *going to be* that is most. He is the only creature capable of anxiety and care. So then he is the servant of God, or the servant of fear and worry. There can be no service of God but that which includes everything and claims the whole life. There is a notion that such out and out and whole-hearted service for God is a kind of privilege to which a few saintly souls may attain—a sort of first-class carriage to Heaven for fortunate people who can afford it—whilst most of us must go third. Away with so monstrous a notion. God as supreme, can acknowledge but one service—the best, the deepest, the truest of which we are capable.

He who would not have us sacrifice that which was torn or maimed or lame, will not accept as service that which is half-hearted, or which is shared with His foes. His commandment requires nothing less than a complete surrender. Thou shalt *love—love* the Lord thy God with *all thine heart and mind and soul and strength: and thy neighbour as thyself*. That commandment is the measure of our duty, and for its perfect fulfilment God has provided all grace. He, whose name is Love, is a jealous God, and cannot suffer a divided affection. Be assured of this—the only service which can satisfy God and can satisfy us is a whole-hearted, whole-souled service that extends to all that we are and all that we have, all that we can do and all that we can be.

Off Cape Horn we witnessed a very singular sight. For some miles there was a narrow strip of water, where the great waves flew in broken spray, and dashed high over the ship. On either side the sea was comparatively calm, whilst this boiled with fury, rolling and singing. Yet there was no rock about which the sea surged, nor was there any such fierce wind as to account for it. Overhead the air was thick with sea-fowl. Thousands of birds dived into this troubled water. The smaller fish were, I suppose, flung up by the toss, and thus fell a prey to the birds. I naturally asked what was the reason of this strange sight, and found it was the point at which the tide met the strong current of the sea, and here they raged together. Within, the tide only ran and it was calm. Without, the current prevailed and there too was calm. On this troubled bit they met and neither prevailed. It is the picture of those who are at once too religious to belong to the world—too worldly to belong to religion: torn by both and satisfied by neither.

VIII.

THE PLAGUES

WE come now to the account of the plagues by which the stubborn defiance of Pharaoh is subdued, and the people of Israel are released from bondage.

If to us, accustomed to an unchanging order of things, it is difficult to conceive of any such miraculous interference with nature, let us honestly ask ourselves *in what other way could the deliverance of Israel have been accomplished?* Here is a nation of slaves who have rendered great service to a proud people, and who are utterly subject to the sway of a mighty despot, and spirit-broken and hopeless as they are, they themselves resent the attempts that are made for their freedom. These people, full of fear and quite unable to help themselves, are yet led triumphantly out of their slavery, and brought into possession of a land where they rise to a position of great power, and exercise an influence such as no other people ever exercised before, or scarcely since. If all this be wrought naturally it is a greater miracle than anything involved in the story of the plagues of Egypt. Remember, that they had no powerful ally in any other nation, and were quite unable to strike a blow for themselves. Remember, too, with what difficulty the freedom of any nation of slaves has been accomplished in these times, when the will and efforts of the best citizens have set themselves to secure it. Recall the cost to England of freeing the slaves of the West Indies,—and yet more the cost to America of freeing the Southern States from slavery. How then are these slaves to be delivered? No other account can explain the great fact in the history of Israel, than this—that God Himself by a series of signs and wonders terrified Egypt so that they were glad to be rid of a people whose presence threatened their very existence.

Nor can we forget what these events were to accomplish in the education of Israel and in the education of the world. It was the challenge of God to Egypt through His servant Moses, as long after the challenge of God came to Israel through His servant Elijah. It was the challenge of God to the greatest system of idolatry in the world, the very source and fountain of all the later idolatries. The Almighty passes sentence upon their false gods and seeks to execute it in judgment upon the nation that served them. For Egypt's sake and for the sake of the other nations of the earth, and above all for Israel's sake, this lesson is to be taught—graven for ever upon their memory: buried deep into the national consciousness. It must be writ large that the world may heed it. The great purpose of these plagues and of God's dealing with Egypt is expressed in these words—*Ye shall know that I am the Lord your God which bringeth you out from under the bondage of the Egyptians.* Their deliverance must be altogether and unmistakably of the Lord. And the work must be one of judgment. *Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord.*

Each of the plagues has a distinct significance that could not fail to be recognised both by Israel and Egypt.* In relation to Israel it must be remembered that they had grown accustomed to the idolatries of the land, and could not fail to be contaminated by the superstitions and iniquities of the Egyptians. They must be taught imperishably the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. *I am the Lord* must be spoken again and again with increasing loudness until all the nations of the earth do acknowledge Him.

*For this see Hillington's *SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE LAND OF HAM.*

And amidst the terrors of these visitations do not let us overlook the mercy that mingles with the judgment: and that proclaims a God slow to anger. The signs before the plagues, the warnings which preceded the punishment, show us how that the Most High always threatens before He strikes, and never strikes if holding up His hand is enough. Note, too, the speedy cessation of the plagues when the king yields; then the interval, and the further conference between the several visitations.

The first great plague may be taken as having in itself the principles and purposes of which we have spoken. It came directly out of the river. What the Nile was to Egypt appears from the fact that it is always spoken of as "*the river,*" "*the river of the Egyptians.*" It was the

great divinity of the nation, and was worshipped with the most profound reverence as the god of their gods. It was the source of all life. To an idolatrous people it might certainly come to be regarded as divine much more readily than many of the objects that were worshipped. There was the mystery of its origin, the secret of all the ages, affording room for all kinds of weird imagining. There was its immense length—the longest river in the world, baffling the curiosity of the nations it so enriched, stretching away into the infinite. Then there was the abundance and the sweetness of its waters. To this very day the water of the Nile is held as peculiarly sweet and refreshing, especially as the water of the wells is mostly brackish. Then there was the beneficence of the river, its peculiar enriching of Egypt—coming with noiseless benediction to the soil, renewing the fields and making the ground so fertile that corn and grass and a thousand fruits and vegetables grew with a wonderful luxuriance. About the middle of August the river after a gradual rise of many weeks, poured forth through the channels and openings prepared for it, and covered the lowlands with broad sheets of water depositing upon them the rich alluvial soil brought down in its course from upper Egypt. There was no need of agricultural instruments or processes. As soon as the river had spread itself over the lands and returned to its bed, each man scattered the seed over the ground, and waited patiently for the harvest.

And its beneficence was completed by its beauty. It flowed on between the rich plain which it had by its waters saved from becoming a desert waste like that beyond its touch. On its banks as far as eye could reach stretched the golden corn. Here and there were clusters of palm and groves of sycamore. The level of the plain was broken by hillocks and crowned by villages and temples. Beside the river grew the reeds and flags, and the lotus spread its richly scented flowers on the surface. The river teemed with fish. Whilst the fish of the sea were held to be unclean, the fish of the river were highly esteemed, and amazingly abundant.

And then, too, on the waters of the Nile went the commerce of the nations. Little wonder that all this should have made it to such a people the object of religious worship. In the earlier ages the Egyptians had been accustomed to sacrifice human victims to the Nile at the time of its annual rising, and although this had been discontinued it may have been with some such superstitious thought that the command had been given to cast any male child of the Hebrews into the river.

The great source and giver of life—out of it came the greater divinities, in it dwelt the lesser divinities: the very reptiles which it nourished, the reeds and the flowers which grew on its banks were sacred.

This river held in such veneration is to become the source of Egypt's first great plague.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning: Lo, he goeth unto the water, and thou shall stand by the river's brink to meet him"

The scene reminds us of Elijah waiting for Ahab at the gate of Naboth, so sudden, so startling is the appearance and so terrible.

It is an Egyptian morning. The glory of the dawn fills all the sky as the proud Pharaoh goes amidst his guards and attendants, forth from the palace to the holy river.

Very likely, as many suppose, the occasion was one of some great annual festival in honour of their god.* About him gather the priests, their robes resplendent, and the uplifted ark catching the light of the early sun. They stand ready to pour forth the libations and to offer the incense. The host of people bow in lowliest homage as the priests sing the hymn of worship—"Hail to thee, O Nile, that showest thyself in this land, coming in peace, giving life to Egypt. O hidden one, thou leadest the night onward to the day, a leading that rejoices the heart! Thou overflowest the gardens created by Ra: thou givest life to the animals, thou waterest the land without ceasing, from the path of heaven descending, lover of good, bestower of corn, giving life to every homestead!" The song has ceased: when abruptly before Pharaoh come the servants of God,—Moses, with the rod in his hands, Aaron by his side. Moses is now the prince of God. He rises to all the solemnity of the occasion. Fearless, outspoken, without preface or apology, there rings upon the still air that voice with its terrible prediction—"Jehovah sent me to thee saying, Let My people go, that they may serve Me in

the wilderness: and behold, hitherto thou has not hearkened. Now then, saith the Lord, In this thou shalt know that I am Jehovah: behold I will smite with the rod that is in Mine hand upon the waters that are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood." —Ex. vii. 16, 17.

*See especially Canon Rawlinson's *MOSES: HIS LIFE AND TIMES*, p. 94.

Their very daring was probably their safety. They unarmed and unattended, venturing thus into the presence of Pharaoh, intruding upon this sacred hour, desecrating the worship of the great Egyptian deity, speaking words of such threatening to one accustomed only to the lowliest homage—these men seemed to have beside them the Invisible. If God be not with them how should they have done this thing! And so the host stood and wondered. Aaron took the rod from the hand of Moses and stretched it over the river. And lo, the Nile, the sacred Nile, in the midst of their adoration was turned to blood—grew into a sluggish current, red, loathsome, revolting. And as they turned, the sight and smell of the thing followed them. Every little canal, every pond, every tank, the water which stood in their houses, in vessels of wood and vessels of stone—all stank. The fish died. The putrefaction filled the air. And only by digging down into the earth could the people find anything to drink.

To the superstitious Egyptians, skilled in reading portents and omens, this curse would have a yet further and deeper meaning. It would bring back the recollection of their cruelty to the Hebrews. Was it not in this very Nile that this Moses had been laid because of the law of Pharaoh. It was the manifestation of God's power: and it was the revenge of the God of Israel. It was the terrible indication of One with whom they must settle, if Pharaoh should yet defy His word. (Compare Rev. xvi. 4, where we seem to read the comment on this first great plague.)

To the people it was a terrible calamity. It not only smote at their god, but all the gods within it. It not only destroyed all the drinking water, and that in an atmosphere so hot and dry as Egypt, but they lost their most common and favourite food—*all the fish died*. They could not find water for any purpose, they the cleanliest of all ancient nations, whose very religion demanded the most scrupulous washings of the person—and for seven days they could neither wash themselves, nor their clothes, nor any of their utensils.

But the plague, great and terrible as it must have been to the people, does not seem to have alarmed Pharaoh. For him there were plenty to labour, and so long as water could be had he was satisfied, and in sullen defiance of God he went his way. Rich wine for him supplied the place of water. Rare perfumes thrust away the evil smells that others had to endure. It may have been to this stubborn and hardened king there was a grim and dreadful satisfaction in his haughty defiance of Moses. "Let your God do His worst, I will not yield to Him. I am Pharaoh."

IX.

THE LAST PLAGUE

“Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence.” —EXODUS xi. 1.

WE come now to the hour of Israel’s deliverance. The last plague and final blow. All else led up to this. The death of the first-born was the great climax gradually reached and in growing severity. From the first this was set forth as the penalty of Pharaoh’s refusal to let Israel go. Before Moses had set forth to Egypt this was given him as the message from God. *Thou shalt say unto Pharaoh—Thus saith the Lord, Israel is My son, even my first-born: and I say unto thee, Let My son go that he may serve Me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold I will slay thy son even thy first-born.*” Nine plagues had already come upon the land: but hitherto the power of God had been shown by punishing rather than destroying. More and more severe became these plagues until the cattle and the persons of the Egyptians began to be stricken, and in the plague of the hail those that refused to heed the voice of Moses and to seek shelter were slain. Then came the plague of darkness. Nothing produced so deep an impression upon the king and people as did this, and certainly none was so terrible.

For three days there rested upon the land that awful darkness which was as a weight upon men—a thing that could be felt. The terror was completed by the utter helplessness and sense of isolation, each cut off and alone in the land. *“They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place.”* What dreadful silence fell upon temple and palace, upon street and rive; Egypt was buried as in a tomb. There was the further terror of what should come of it, and how long it should last; and the quickening of men’s conscience in that silence, memory bringing back the record of their cruelty to the people of God, and the proofs of His power. It was for Egypt a time of meditation, an opportunity to hear and heed the voice of the Most High before He should smite with the last great plague. And to the haughty Pharaoh and his princes it was a humiliating proof of his powerlessness. What could he do with all his horsemen and his men of war, sitting there in silence with none that could minister to him—what could he do to hinder the escape of Israel? With the clear light of heaven shining upon their hosts how easily they could have got up and gone forth with wives and little ones—for there was none to stay them!

The effect of this plague upon Egypt was very marked. As soon as it had passed away Pharaoh called for Moses and said: *“Go ye: serve the Lord: let your little ones go with you—only let your flocks and herds be stayed.”*

We must remember that the sheep and cattle of Egypt had suffered very greatly: they had been destroyed by the plagues of murrain and hail, and the sustenance had been cut off even from those that had escaped, so that the flocks and herds of Goshen were now of very great value. But Moses will not hear of the proposal. Pharaoh has now to do with a very different man from him who had first ventured into the palace on this errand. Emboldened and made fearless by the manifested presence of God, now it is Moses who makes terms. Egypt and Israel have changed places, and it is Egypt that must beg for deliverance. The swift and sudden change that has come upon the nation appears in the eleventh chapter. *“Speak now in the ears if the people and let every man ask (as it is in the R.V.) of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver and jewels of gold.”*

As in many lands to-day where banks are unknown and property is not safe, so was it the custom for the Egyptians to keep their wealth in the shape of portable ornaments of gold,—earrings and bracelets and anklets, and rings on every finger and on the thumb, were the common possession of men and of women.

“And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians.” No doubt very many of them who lived near to Goshen would be glad to share the safety in which Israel dwelt, and would be glad to have such friends in time of such troubles as had come upon Egypt. But most

marked was the change that had come upon the land in reference to Moses. “Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants, and in the sight of the people.” As he passed along the streets this idolatrous people may well have been ready to fall down before him and do him homage—this man whose word was mightier than the magicians, who seemed to hold in his hand and at his bidding all the forces of evil before whom Pharaoh himself trembled, and against whom their very gods were powerless.

So then let us set the scene before us. The king and his court, hushed and awed by the mystery of the darkness, send for Moses. He stands more majestic than ever, conscious of being the messenger of the God of Israel. “Go ye, serve the Lord,” cries Pharaoh, “your wives and your little ones. Only let your cattle and herds be stayed.”

But Moses stands and looks upon the king. This is not the man and this is not the time to hear of compromise. “Our cattle shall also go with us,” saith he. “There shall not an hoof be left behind.” Then Pharaoh starts up enraged. Here in his palace, amidst his courtiers, and with his armed men about him is he to be bearded and insulted by this Hebrew!

The eyes flash with fire: the face is white with passion, and turning upon Moses he cries: *“Begone, see my face no more. The day thou seest my face thou shalt die.”*

Moses is the king, not Pharaoh. With a dignified consciousness of power he stands and answers: “Thou hast well said, I will see thy face no more.” And he turned as if to leave. Whilst yet he was in the palace it would seem there came to him the message of God. A face such as Pharaoh had never looked upon is it that Moses turns to the king now. With a voice fierce and threatening Moses cried in a great anger—*“A heat of anger”* as it is in the margin. It is the fire that takes long to kindle that glows with a white heat, fierce and consuming. This meek man in a fury is a sight before which the king and his courtiers might well quail. The eyes flash indignantly, the man draws himself up to his full height, the speech loses its slowness and burns its way. “Thus saith THE LORD, About midnight will I go into the midst of Egypt, and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sitteth on the throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the first-born of cattle. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there hath been none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee: and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger.”

This is the Moses of whom Stephen tells,—the man mighty in words and deeds.

Thus these days which have been such a plague to Egypt have been a token to Israel. They have been the opportunity for getting the people of Israel together, and arranging for the feast of the Passover—a very different people are they from the dispirited and hopeless slaves they had been but a few weeks ago.

Each plague had been to them the manifestation of the might of their Helper: the right hand that smote for their deliverance. With a confidence in Moses that made them ready to heed his lightest word they gathered together, and made arrangements for the great observance with which they were to celebrate their deliverance.

Those three days of darkness upon Egypt doubtless would end their slavery. The taskmasters are more in dread of the slaves now than the slaves of the taskmasters, and are eager to make their peace with a people whose God is so mighty, and for whom such wonders are wrought. Soon the people of Israel are busy preparing the Passover.

Thus Egypt and Israel alike waited for the striking of the dread hour.

THE INSTITUTION of the PASSOVER

EXODUS xii. 1.

BETWEEN the last interview of Moses with Pharaoh and the death of the first-born, the Israelites are directed to make ready for the Passover. At once they would eagerly commence to carry out that great observance which was really to mark their deliverance. It was the inauguration of the service of the God of the Hebrews.

At the outset it is well for us to ask ourselves for a moment where this observance, perpetuated to this day amongst the Jews and throughout the whole Christian Church, could have come from unless from the great national deliverance of Israel; from this wonderful triumph over Pharaoh, and their passage across the Red Sea? It is clear at a glance that it is impossible to originate and to sustain a national celebration like this unless there was something to celebrate. The thing celebrated was not a matter that rested upon the testimony of two or three, or of a favoured company. The passage across the Red Sea was a matter in which the whole nation took part. It was not a question for trained experts, but a thing that the little children could see and remember. How could you get a nation to celebrate its own deliverance unless it took place? And the very name and all the incidents of the ordinance point immediately to a series of events which could have no meaning except as the record of the direct intervention of GOD, and the miraculous deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt. That cannot be an invention in which the people themselves are to celebrate that which they themselves have done, and which they are carefully to explain to their enquiring children—"It shall come to pass that when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? ye shall say unto them, "IT IS THE SACRIFICE OF THE LORD'S PASSOVER, WHO PASSED OVER THE HOUSES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL IN EGYPT, WHEN HE SMOTE THE EGYPTIANS AND DELIVERED OUR HOUSES."

But the Passover which thus points backwards point also as clearly forward, and is a wonderful type of the great salvation which is ours in Christ Jesus. The whole Epistle to the Romans is wrapped up in it.

The first great truth upon the very face of it is that *all have sinned*. There is no difference between Egypt and Israel in that respect. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God; and upon Israel and Egypt sin has brought condemnation and the sentence of death. It was nothing that Israel could say, "We have Abraham to our father." It was useless for them to boast of what God had done for them in the miracles that had been wrought. Where the blood was not sprinkled there alike the Angel of Death smote, whether they within the house were Israelites or Egyptians. No privilege, no position, no knowledge can be *our* safety any more than it could be theirs. From end to end of the Bible there runs this one truth—WITHOUT SHEDDING OF BLOOD IS NO REMISSION,—from that early scene when Abel brings the lamb as it had been slain, and received the testimony that God was well-pleased with him, right on until we stand with the Seer and ask, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and whence come they?" and hear the answer, "these are they which . . . washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Let us be sure that no privilege, no position, no knowledge, can be *our* safety any more than it could be theirs. Nothing can cancel the penalty of our sin but the atoning blood of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Then notice secondly, *That the way of deliverance was of Gods' direction*. They were to take a lamb without spot or blemish, and to bring it home on the tenth day; on the fourteenth day it was to be slain, and the blood caught in the basin was to be sprinkled on the lintel and door-posts. Israel had seen many tokens of God's power—lightnings and darkness and murrain and hail—and in all a distinction had been made between Israel and Egypt. The Israelite might have comforted himself with the assurance of that distinction. But, as we have

seen, wherever the blood was not sprinkled the first-born lay dead. It may be that we cannot perceive what the death of the Son of God has done for us; it may be that we cannot understand why such a deliverance should be required. But let us remember that our sense of sin is very dim and imperfect. Our thought of God's holiness is poor and broken indeed. There are purposes concerning us far-reaching, going beyond all that we can know at present. Above all, let us remember that it is with the righteous God that we have to settle this matter of deepest and eternal import. And if it please God to reveal to us His way of salvation, by which His righteousness is declared and yet His love has triumphed, shall we not eagerly accept it, adoring Him that He has devised a way in which He can be just and the justifier of him that believeth?

Notice, further, the prominent features in the sacrifice of the Passover.

It was in the house. There was no Church that ever had such holy places for its celebration as the Jewish Church. Theirs was the tabernacle where dwelt the manifested presence of the Most High; and theirs was a temple more glorious than any house of worship earth had ever seen; a place beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth. Yet this, the most solemn festival of the Jewish Church, the very central observance of its ritual was AT HOME. We turn from the tabernacle of blue and purple and gold, enriched by its cunning needlework, and made awful by its solemnities; we leave the temple with its holy of holies, its sacred courts, its gilded roof and fretted pinnacles, and turn aside to the poor hut of the slave. A mud-hut cottage and rudely thatched, the whole place showing the poverty and wretchedness of the bondman and his family—the door-posts bent, perhaps broken:—and yet here it is that the lamb is slain; here it is that the blood is sprinkled. So again, was it in the beginning of the Christian Church, when the disciples “brake bread” from house to house.

Again, the Jewish Church exalted as no other Church could the power of the priest. By birth and by a hundred distinctions of Divine appointment, he was marked off for his high calling. Never had any other priest such authority; his it was to bear the sins of the people before God, and his to bring forth the benediction of the Most High. *But in this most solemn ordinance of the Passover the priest took no part.* From beginning to end the priest was neither seen nor heard. We turn from him in his robes of beauty and glory, with the breast-plate of gold hung with the golden chain and ribbons of blue; and before us comes the poor Israelite, everything about him proclaiming his coarse work and the cruelty of the taskmaster. *He* is to kill the lamb; *he* is to take the blood and to sprinkle it upon the door-posts. It is to be wholly and only a personal matter between the man himself and his God. It cannot be transferred to another, or bestowed by another. Our own faith must claim this great salvation; our own heart must receive this free gift. *No man can give another the sacrament.* Not he who gives it makes it the sacrament, but he who takes it. Not that hand that holds it forth, but his who receives it must consecrate and transform the bread and wine into the emblem of the crucified Redeemer. Surely it is very remarkable that in relation to an ordinance in which the priest has come to claim an awful authority, in that church where all was most minutely ordered of the Lord, *the priest had not part*; that the Passover, on which the Saviour founded the holy sacrament which was to perpetuate His memory, was established and observed when as yet there was no priest in existence.

Then, again, it was a most homely celebration. The Jewish religion was one of splendid ritual, celebrated amidst golden vessels,—the seven branched candlestick, the altars, the golden censers, and behind all the tapestried curtain, stretching up to the space above where the golden vine trailed its branches, and hung in clusters of grapes. All the more remarkable then was it that this ordinance is to be observed in lowly hut and celebrated by a slave. No gold or silver is there here. Everything is of the poorest and homeliest.

And in recalling how that in the upper chamber of a peasant's house the Blessed Master ordained the ordinances of the Last Supper, let us remember how little He cared for either great display or the awe of mysterious processes. Was He not, and *is* He not the meek and lowly One, who came eating and drinking, going into the homes of the people and sitting

down in their midst; here too in all points like unto them? His disciples were fishermen; and His readiest and most eager listeners were the common people. Think, then, how great a grief it must be to Him when we make His supper a mystery so dreadful that many come to His table with fear, and timid souls are afraid to come at all.

Lastly, notice that this was *the only way of Israel's deliverance*. Forth went the Angel of Death and sped swiftly through the land. But where the blood was on the door-posts there was he powerless to strike. Beneath the sprinkled blood Israel dwelt in safety through that night; and at the dawning of the day marched forth from underneath the blood-stained lintel, no more the slaves of Pharaoh, but God's free men. The redeemed of the Lord, they have obtained joy and gladness, and go forth with singing to the goodly Zion whither their God should lead them. So let us be well assured that nothing can break the power of sin, nothing can deliver from its death sentence, but the precious blood of Jesus Christ our crucified Redeemer.

ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE

"And it came to pass the self-same day, that the Lord did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts." —EXODUS xii. 51.

NEVER probably in the history of the world was there a scene more tragic and more wonderful than this of Israel's deliverance. What a night was it when in every little hut and hovel of the Hebrews each family waits expectant for the coming of the God of Israel—their souls stirred by the strange ceremony in which they have taken part the blood sprinkled on the door-posts, and themselves standing ready for a journey, waiting for the moment of their freedom. *A nation is to be born in a day.* Night has settled upon Egypt, upon its palaces, upon the stately houses of its nobles, upon the lowly homes of its toilers in all the land. Now comes the dread moment when the Angel of the Lord goes forth on his errand, whose shadow is the shadow of death. Swift is his flight, and as he passes, lo! the first-born is dead in every house. Then bursts upon the still night from every side a cry, the like of which had never been heard—*"The first-born is dead! dead!"* And all the nation sprang forth, as if delay meant further death, and thrust upon the Israelites their jewels of silver and their jewels of gold, and urged them to be gone. And forth marched Israel, a people for whom their God had wrought such great wonders—they and their little ones, their flocks and their herds—a great host numbering probably more than two millions of people. Not a disorderly mob was it, but like the host of God, marshalled and "harnessed," or as it is rendered in the margin by *five in a rank*, step by step, each tribe under the leadership of the head man. And over them rose the wondrous tokens of God's presence—the pillar of cloud casting upon them its kindly shade, and by night it shone a pillar of fire to give them light.

Very gracious are the words that come in amidst the great and terrible things which have been wrought for Israel. *"And it came to pass when Pharaoh had let the people go, God led them, not through the lands of the Philistines, although that was near: for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt. But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea."*

I have read in Swiss guide-books repeatedly the caution, *Beware of short cuts*, and have found not infrequently that short cuts often go a long way round. The nearest way is not always the best or the quickest, and the roundabout is often shortest. How tender was this considerateness for the people! If this had been an invention of man we should not have read amidst such a splendid triumph the record of such a gracious compassion, but it is the very mark and token of our God, who telleth the number of the stars and who healeth the broken in heart. He leadeth us ever in a right way, and that way is not hard or exhausting. By-and-by shall Israel go forth against the Philistines and win great victories; but not yet. Soul, if thou wilt let God lead thee, He will lead thee tenderly as well as wisely, and He shall deal with thee according to thy needs. *"He knoweth our frame: He remembereth that we are dust."* He doth not scorn our weakness, but is ever mindful of it. He shall not laugh at our fears, but quiet them. This is surely the greatest, the sweetest, the richest token of God's love,—that He can be gracious to our fears.

Nor can we afford to overlook one other record of this host as they left Egypt: *they took with them the bones of their father Joseph.* Very strange must have been that mummied figure in the very forefront of the host: a faith of three hundred years ago living amongst them still and finding its fulfilment now. "For Joseph had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you." It was the constant declaration and reminder whither they were going, the link between that past with all its promises and that future with all its purposes: a faith that was grandly contagious, as faith always is,—day and night that strange presence going with them to their resting-place. So was it indeed that he being dead yet spake.

Now there comes to Moses probably the greatest trial of his faith that could possibly occur. We must think of him as the great warrior, once the victorious head of all the Egyptian army. We must think of him too as the born leader of men, with a swift and unerring perception of advantage and peril. God directs him to turn to the southward—towards the Red Sea, a place of which the Egyptians should at once say that they were entangled. On one side the wilderness; on another side the steep rocky heights of a mountain range; and in front of them the Red Sea.

Meanwhile Pharaoh and the Egyptians have recovered from their fright. The pestilence that they had dreaded had ceased; and probably the magicians and priests, eager to recover the position which they had lost, take to themselves the credit of having delivered the nation, and now proclaim Israel's speedy overthrow. Moreover they had begun to find out how great was their loss,—a vast army of workmen suddenly taken from them, besides the treasures which in their fright they had thrust upon the people. Not Pharaoh only was it who was resolved upon recapturing them, but the heart of his servants was turned against Israel and they cried: "Why have we done this? why have we let them go from serving us?" At once Pharaoh, in his pride and fury, smarting under the insults and penalties that he had suffered, gathered his host together. "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil: my lust shall be satisfied upon them." So rang his proud boast. And leading forth six hundred of his chariots and the hosts of armed warriors he hastened after them. Whilst Pharaoh is on his way let us set before us the position of Israel.

Here are these hundreds of thousands of men and women and children, a host untrained and undisciplined with flocks and herds; without a sword or spear among them for their defence; a people brought suddenly from slavery and scarcely capable yet if valuing worthily the great gift of their deliverance; haunted too with a cringing dread of their Egyptian masters, and peculiarly liable to be stricken with panic. And now it is that they pass down the narrow gorge between the rocky heights that hem them in. As the shades of evening gather there bursts the storm, roaring and raging as if it would sweep them into the sea. Before them breaks the thunder of the angry waves. It seems as if they were trapped for the foe. Then comes the dreaded evil that completes their misery and the cry rings from the host, "The Egyptians be upon us." Up against the lurid sunset on the ridge of the hills appear the chariots of Pharaoh. In the anguish of their despair the people turn upon Moses. "Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness." Every moment the host of warriors increases, until all the height seems covered with the chariots and the troops of armed men. Amidst such an agony of fear the sun goes down, and utter darkness sweeps over the host.

Now out upon the blast of the storm rings the voice of Moses calm and untroubled, "Fear ye not. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will shew you to-day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever."

Then the pillar of the cloud moved from the head of the host to the rear and hid the movement of Israel. To those it was darkness, thick darkness, such as may well have caused Pharaoh to be frightened, but to these it was light. The glory of the Lord is risen upon them: a light of unearthly beauty, softened as if the Lord looked forth in tender pity upon His people, lifting upon them the light of His countenance. And now the winds beat back the waters; and the voice of the great leader bids them "*Go forward.*" Forth marches the host, down into the path of the mighty deep, bedecked with treasure of shell and coral, with clustering sea weed and golden sand. So onward through that wondrous night until the last of the host has started. Then the pillar of cloud is lifted from protecting the host as its rear-guard; and Egypt looks down from the heights to see that their captives have fled, that they have availed themselves of the effect of wind and tide and have gone across the sea. Not a moment is to be lost. Mad at having so easily overtaken their prey, so assuredly counted upon them and yet to have lost them after all, they sweep down from their heights, almost uncontrollable in their wrath. "The Egyptians pursued and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses,

his chariots, and his horsemen.” But the ponderous chariot-wheels sunk deep in the sand and dragged heavily. Moreover “the Lord looked upon the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud and troubled the host of the Egyptians.” The wild storm beat furiously, bewildering the horses, blinding the leaders, terrifying the followers. The roar and roll of thunder shook the very ground, and out of the darkness came the forked flashes of the lightning,—“God’s dagger, plunging through the gloom.”

Meanwhile the day was breaking. And now Israel stood ranged upon the shore and along the cliffs, and they looked down upon the Egyptians. Then it was as if the mighty hands that kept back the floods were loosened. The gathering waters swept and surged until they leapt in their giant strength. In vain the Egyptians sought to return. Their cry of terror rang out sharp and terrible as the great seas met and dashed in glorious thunder,—and the armed Egyptians, horse and chariots, all the host of them, rolled in the depths of that dreadful tide.

At once as if its work was done the wild storm died away. The morning dawned all fresh and still. The waves, as if spent by their fury, are touched and kindled with ruddy splendour by the rising sun,—a sea of glass mingled with fire. With their enemies perished, with the land of bondage for ever behind them, with the goodly country stretching before them, with God their own God dwelling in their midst, Israel sang exultantly the song of Moses, —the world’s oldest poem, and to this day one of its very noblest and most sublime. “Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is a man of war: the Lord of Hosts is His name. . . . Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. He said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my lust shall be satisfied upon them: I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’ Thou didst blow with Thy breath: Thy sea covered them, they sank as lead in the mighty waters.”

And for us what teaching and help is there here? All this past history for us becomes prophecy,—the very picture of the triumph that shall be ours.” I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire, and them that had gotten the victory stand on the sea of glass having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” So is all this a type and picture of the redeemed. Heaven’s highest songs do grow out of this poor life of ours, like the water-lily rooted in the muddy depths, swayed by the currents hither and thither,—yet ever pushing up into the light, until at last it lifts its head above the flood and unfolds itself to heaven and floats in all its loveliness,—the fair up-growth from the mire; the pure result of chill floods and dreary days. “They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” They celebrate the Power that delivered them, the Grace that redeemed them, the Providence that led them.

MARAH AND ELIM

"I am the Lord that healeth thee." —EXODUS xv. 26.

THIS chapter is a parable on healing—a very beautiful and living story for Hospital Sunday. Have you noticed the sharp and sudden contrast as we pass from the triumph of Israel to the record of Marah? Listen to the opening of the chapter—*"Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. . . . The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is His name. . . . And Miriam the prophetess took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea."* The air rings with music. The most wonderful triumph that earth had ever seen is celebrated in the sublimest song that earth had ever heard.

Then sounds the command that they go forward, and with light hearts and glad steps as if that music of their deliverance still rang in their souls, they start. *"And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. And when they came to Marah they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. And the people murmured against Moses and said, What shall we drink?"*

So Israel, though so gloriously delivered, meets with troubles. Marching through a wilderness was bad enough, a stretch of dreary waste, great and terrible, its fierce heat withering them. But a wilderness without water! Think of this host of men and women and children with their flocks and herds, and there is no water. The cry of a people without bread is an awful thing, but thirst is more cruel and maddening than hunger. It is no great wonder that the men came with eyes flashing in rage against Moses and cried *What shall we drink?*

We must remember too how vividly there would rise before them the memory of the sweet and abundant waters of the Nile. How unfailing was its supply; how delicious its draught; how easy it was to get. They seemed in their dreams to hear the ripple of its flow along the banks, and they seemed to stoop and drink of its abundance—then woke to the fever and agony of thirst.

And not the past only was it that rose up to mock them by its contrast, but all that they had hoped in the future. Had not God sent Moses into their midst promising that He would bring them up into *a goodly land flowing with milk and honey?* Milk and honey, indeed! And they were perishing with thirst. They had been told of luxuries, and they lacked the commonest necessity of life.

And they were in the right way—the way in which they were led—not indeed the way they would have chosen, not the direct way from Egypt to Canaan, but a way round about. If it had been a judgment they might have understood it; but for this to meet them in the path of obedience; to have been led by such great and glorious tokens of God's favour, and by such wonderful manifestations of God's power—and yet to have no water! This is strange indeed.

And then came that which completed their misery. Now to these distressed hosts there gleamed afar off the signs of a fountain. The green grass grew luxuriant amidst the desert waste, the trees rose up luxuriant, with delicious shade. With eager eyes the foremost looked, and proclaimed the tidings, *Water, water!* The glad news spread on every hand, *Water, water!* The farthest heard it, and the last hastened eagerly. But as the host gathers there goes up a wail of disappointment—they cannot drink of it. The joy is turned to lamentation and anger, and they cry in despair, *Marah, Marah! bitterness, bitterness!*

What is the meaning of this sharp lesson at the very outset of their pilgrimage? Let us look into it, for to see it is to see the principle that abides and that underlies God's dealings with us. The wilderness is God's school—not the home, but the school where His children have to learn that which shall fit them for home. It is not true love that prompts the mother to keep the little son at home because he may get amongst rough lads, and because lessons are hard and many.

That is a foolish fondness that will be the boy's undoing. God loves us too well and too wisely not to send us to school. And the first lesson that Israel had to learn was to *look up*—the lesson of their dependence upon God and of their fulness in Him. The great difference between Egypt and Canaan was this: that in Egypt they looked *down* for everything, and in Canaan they looked *up* for everything. And the wilderness was the school where they were to learn to look up. The difference is the great, deep, root difference. "The land whither thou goest," said Moses, "is not like the land of Egypt which thou waterest with thy foot"; the Nile by its overflow gave to the land its fertility, and by the water-wheel or by the bucket they carried the water. "But the land whither thou goest *drinketh in the rain of heaven*." That is the first lesson, look up: learn to see God: to trust God. And was it not worth three days' thirst to learn that lesson, to get it laid deep as a foundation for their faith? God's mercy is truest and richest, if we would but see it, in that He is willing by such sharp lessons to teach us great truths that cannot otherwise be learned. The plough must rend the clods with its keen and heavy share if the fields are to be enriched with the golden corn. Men who would build a house that is fit to live in must dig and find a firm foundation first. Herein also is love. That first, it was the lesson in *looking up*. That was for them the great lesson—and for us. It was the meaning of all God's dealing with them —of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night—they could only tell which way to go by looking up. It was the meaning of the manna. And this is the meaning of life's mysteries: of the sicknesses and wants that meet us. Look up. We are to live looking up for everything. Old Gurnall puts it very quaintly, "Some men are like the swine that never look into heaven until they are laid on their backs, and never cry for mercy until the knife is at their throat." By gentler and more gracious methods—the methods of our wants—God teaches us to look up. Sickness, with its quietness and helplessness and seriousness, has taught thousands of men to look up. I heard a little while ago of a good man who was giving the story of his conversion. "I was very ill and had to go into the hospital at Bedford," said he, "and there I began to think about things much more seriously than I had ever done before. I had time and opportunity to take stock of myself, and to see things in the light of eternity. It was doubtful if I should get better. I went from thinking to praying. I did pray to God with all my heart for light and help. Well one day the door of the infirmary was opened, and an old gentleman came in (it was Mr. Howard, the grandfather of Mrs. Price Hughes, and a dear friend of my own), 'Good morning, my friend,' said he, 'good morning, I thought you would like to hear the news. It is glorious news. It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief; good morning, good morning.' And he was gone. But those words came to me," said the man, "as if God spoke them to my heart by His Holy Spirit. I saw it all and accepted it all, and peace and joy filled my soul." That is the first lesson. *Look up*.

But now let us go on with our parable, and find another lesson. The host have gathered about the water, fierce and murmuring that it should be bitter and undrinkable. Then Moses prayed to the Lord, and he found a tree that, cast into the waters, healed them and made them sweet. Now it is interesting to learn that the Bedouins are accustomed to put into such bitter water a kind of barberry that makes it drinkable, and they use the word "tree" for anything that has medicinal properties. There are besides, in other countries, plants and trees that have this quality. A German missionary on the coast of Africa tells of a spring in the mission garden that was made drinkable by throwing into it a branch of a particular tree, and that the natives cover the bottom of the newly dug wells with branches of this tree to keep the water sweet. And in Peru a plant called yerva has the power to purify any water, however salt and bad. (See Geikie, vol. ii. p. 204.) *It is important to see in the incident a natural rather than a supernatural cause*. Then the sweetened waters gladdened and satisfied the people and their children and cattle. And then came the remarkable application of the parable. It was not only an incident in the history of Israel, but we read: "There He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and said, *If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will*

put none of these diseases upon thee which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee."

We see in it a beautiful and blessed revelation of God. Remember how this people had come to think of God—the Lord Jehovah. In the plagues of Egypt they had seen terrible proofs of His almighty power. They had seen the forces of darkness and destruction gathered against Pharaoh. From nature He had summoned that which withered all the might of Egypt and made them powerless: Darkness and hail, and lightnings, and insect, and plagues of boils and blains and then at last the firstborn dead in every house. Later they had seen the might of Jehovah in their own deliverance and in the overthrow of Pharaoh with his horsemen and chariots. They had sung of Him: "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, who art glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders. Thou stretchest out Thy right hand, the earth swallowed them."

But not by such manifestations can trust and love be won. Not thus do men learn to call God Father. Fear and awe must have filled their souls. Such terrible forces in nature might well make them afraid. *Their eyes must be opened to see in nature another ministry—tender, gentle, beneficent.* "And the Lord shewed Moses a tree which, when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet." And with every drop and draught of that sweet water came the gentle and gracious message: *"I am the Lord that healeth thee."* This is why troubles and wants meet us: that they may be opportunities for our faith and God's help. Think if the Red Sea had not hemmed Israel in, and proud Pharaoh had not pursued them, how little they would have known of the greatness of their God. If they had not thirsted in the wilderness, how could they have learnt of their fulness in Him? Would that we could all learn this lesson—so easy to preach, so hard to practise—that our wealth lies in our wants. Our knowledge of God comes most largely from our needs. When the Lord Jesus was here upon earth it was the blind and the sick, the maimed, the halt, that drew forth that love and power, and lit it up for the whole world. How infinitely poorer and sadder the world had been through all the ages if when Jesus Christ came there had been no fevered, no little maiden sick at Jairus' home, no poor woman spent and suffering, no blind man sitting by the wayside begging. These wants have enriched the world; these sufferers have made all the ages their debtor.

All Israel is hushed and watchful while Moses prays. It is thus that meek and lowly schoolmaster Moses is teaching them their A B C. When in doubt, when in difficulty, *pray. And the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.* For us that tree always waits by the bitter well; but the Lord keeps the secret, and He must show it unto us. Prayer can always heal the bitterness. We know a tree, indeed, that makes the bitter sweet, the tree whereon He hung who bare our sins in His own body. *There* is the love that doth never fail to sweeten life; *there* is a purpose concerning us which seems to make all well. Prayer in itself is a blessed cure for bitterness. God's presence and God's peace do sweeten life, and though the cup be bitter, still the sight of the Hand that holds the cup doth bring the strength and grace to drink it.

What trouble it would have saved Israel if only they had learned *once for all* the meaning of the wilderness life! Rather, what trouble it would save us if we could learn the lesson well—that life, life eternal, is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. That which teaches us more of our God is God's best gift and earth's richest possession. The abiding wealth of life is what we know of Him. It is easy to see that if Israel had only got adjusted and had fitted in exactly with God's plan, their life had been easy and triumphant. And is it not exactly true for us? If we would only get adjusted, and would only fit in perfectly with God's plan, how blessed should our life be! What then is God's plan and purpose? *That we be conformed to the image of His Son.* For this, all things work together; to this end all things are set and timed. We set up a notion of what is good and cry for it, and pout and murmur because we can't get it. We cry for the deadly nightshade, and think its berries must be sweet. God seeks to teach us that the only *good* is that for which all things work together—*That we be conformed to the image of His Son.*

And they came to Elim where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters. That is where the chapter ends. *And they encamped there.* That is where God always means the chapter to end—every chapter. We go to school to learn the lesson, but then we are to go home to the Father's house to dinner. Marah is on the way: but it is best to leave it on the way. Some people pitch their tents at Marah and live there. To be miserable is with them a sign of grace, to groan is to pray; and where others sing they sigh. If ever they get a meal they "dip the parched corn in the vinegar." My brother, God's train may stop at Marah, but not for long, and certainly not for refreshments. It is not the terminus. You need not stay there; go on to Elim, *that is where God means you to encamp.*

WE reach today the story of the manna. It is the next great lesson in the school of the wilderness. The children of Israel as we are accustomed to call them are but children, and as such they are dealt with—patiently, graciously—taught as we teach our children, by pictures and parables. Let us set the scene before us. Behind them is Egypt with its memories, the darker parts more vivid. We have a trick of remembering best what it is most convenient to remember. Again arose the angry murmurs of the people at Moses, “Would God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt” ; it is the hard miserable heart of unbelief that speaks here—*died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt*. Had not that hand smitten off their fetters, and overthrown their oppressors, and brought them across the Red Sea in triumph? Was it not the hand of which they had sung, “Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power, Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy”? And now they fret and moan, “Would God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt”! Hard thoughts of God are at the heart of all our murmuring. What a miserably blind thing this grumbling is. “When we sat by the flesh-pots and when we did eat bread to the full.” What insolence! One would think that they had been independent gentlemen, and self-indulgent lords. What a picture of luxurious ease, as if they had said to themselves: “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up; thou hast nothing to do but to eat and drink and make merry.” Why, the crack of the taskmaster’s whip would soon have been about their shoulders if they had attempted any such laziness, and the dry “Ye are idle” would have fetched them speedily back to the slime pits. No wonder Moses grew indignant at their murmurings. But God’s answer is in the gift of the manna. How patiently He bears with them, filling with angels’ food the mouths that murmured.

So God opened their eyes to see Himself. This was the one great lesson of the wilderness, *that they should see Him who is invisible*. As long as they saw only the stretch of desert sand, the barren mountains riven and scarred, what hope was there of any bread? They are hemmed in by very despair. But the moment they saw the Almighty God with them, what chance was there of their perishing? Everything was altered then. This is the great wilderness lesson for them and for us. God’s presence, God’s care, God’s provision, are ours. Do you wonder at their dullness of perception, that they should have had such deliverances, and yet should doubt? Alas that it is so much easier to see other people’s failings than to cure our own. What proofs of His faithfulness, what tokens of His power, what manifestations of His goodness have we had, and yet how persistent are these fears and doubts of ours. And mark well that fears and doubts are, so to speak, the murmurings of the heart, incipient undeveloped murmurings. As there are songs without words, so there are murmurings without mutterings.

We, too, are children who need to go to school and learn the lesson. Do let us learn that the Lord accepts the responsibility of His people. If He comes to lead them into the goodly land, He is not going to leave them to perish in the wilderness; that which He has promised, He will assuredly fulfil. Some people find it easy enough to believe the great and sublime and spiritual promises. They can understand that God should be willing to set before us glorious visions of heaven, but they fret and fear about the common things of the daily life as if these were altogether beneath His notice, and outside His thought. Do you not see how our daily bread is wrapped up with the very name and kingdom of God in the prayer which we are taught to utter—“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in Heaven.” What next? “Give us this day our daily bread.” Nothing can quiet the murmurings of the heart until we learn to live a life of happy dependence upon God for everything. In the seventh verse of this chapter there is a phrase which is very notable in connection with the manna. Here for the first time do we meet with it.

"In the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord." If you take the use of this phrase in the Scriptures you will find it limited to the sublimest incidents, and it is evidently expressive of the manifested presence of God. You find it in the tenth verse—"And it came to pass, that as Aaron spake with the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud." Now was the wilderness transformed—glorified. This holy place became as the house of God, and the gate of heaven. Turn for the significance of the phrase to the twenty-fourth chapter of Exodus, and the sixteenth and seventeenth verses—"And the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai, and the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel." Again, in the last chapter of Exodus and the thirty-third verse, the phrase occurs when the tabernacle is finished and the manifested presence of God enters into the Holy of Holies. "So Moses finished the work. Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode therein, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." Take another reference in the Second Chronicles, the fifth chapter and the thirteenth and fourteenth verses, which describes the completion of the temple. "It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice, the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: *for the glory of the Lord had filled the house.*" See also 2 Chronicles vii. 1, 2, 3. Long afterwards, after a dreary interval, the phrase meets us again, gathering up all these memories, repeating and fulfilling them. "And the glory of the Lord shone round about them. And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord."

It is surely a very striking fact that this phrase, limited to such special and peculiar manifestation of the Divine Presence, should be used on the occasion of the gift of the manna. We should have looked for it at the overthrow of Pharaoh amidst the splendid terrors of that night when Egypt's pride was broken and the power destroyed. But not so. There was the command: "Stand still, and see the salvation of God." But the glory of God is not in destruction, not in storm and battle. His glory is the tender care of His people, and in His gracious provision for them. "Ye shall see the glory of God," and so we go forth and find it in the manna. Is it not the very picture of the Son of Man? He who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many? And is it not a beautiful association of the glory of God with the daily bread which long after, the blessed Master Himself set forth in the Lord's prayer?

"In the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost upon the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is *manna* (what is it?), for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat." So the face of the wilderness, that dreary barren waste, was covered with plenty. The wilderness and solitary place was glad for them; the desert had rejoiced and blossomed as the rose, it had blossomed abundantly. Oh, who is like unto the Lord! How blessed, how glorious a thing it is to have God to take care of us. Where no corn could grow or trembling grass-blade lift itself, there the Heavenly Father can spread a table for His children, and bid them come and eat. In a night it is done whilst the host slept. No ploughman had gone forth to turn the furrow; no hand had cast the seed; none went forth with sickle. They awake, and, lo, there was the gracious Lord, as long after He stood on the shore of Galilee in the early morning saying, "Come and break your fast." It was all ready and waiting for them.

Do let us learn that God's resources are never exhausted. Every door on earth may be shut, as they were here. Below is the desert sand, the barren rock: above, the cloudless

heaven: afar off and altogether out of reach, the land of plenty. But God can always open windows in heaven. He who is the Lord of the Harvest and the Maker of Paradise is never at such a pass that He cannot help and deliver His children. He who openeth His hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing has not taught us to call Him Father for nothing. He will acknowledge and answer to the name. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

"This is the thing that the Lord hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating." God suits His blessings to their needs and natures. "Ah," said one, "I am a man who requires a great deal of nourishment. My little children may manage to live on this manna, but I have a large frame to keep up." Do not fear, my hungry friend; if thou dost need much, much shall be given, and this small round thing shall sustain thee. Fear not.

"And Moses said, let no man leave of it till the morning." The great lesson was that of dependence—your Heavenly Father careth for you. This message was to be spoken to them every day by the voice of the manna for forty years. There is always enough for gratitude, but never enough for greed. A daily supply for a daily need. To-morrow must wait till it comes. God was teaching them to live *a day at a time*. He who rushed forth and began to scrape and pile, saying within himself, "I make hay *before* the sun shines, there is no telling what may happen to-morrow, the price may go up: I will make sure of my supply whilst I can," found on the morrow that *it bred worms and stank*. Every day's event was to lead them afresh to look up for the day's supply. So He taught them to pray—"Our Father who art in Heaven, give us this day our daily bread."

THIS is the title we may put at the head of this chapter—*wants and wars*. The chapter teaches us at the outset two things that we need to learn.

The first is that we may be the people of God, redeemed at a great price, delivered with a glorious deliverance, enriched with ten thousand precious promises,—yet there are two things that will meet us as long as we live in this world—*wants and wars*. God loves His children a great deal too much and a great deal too wisely ever to let them be independent of Himself. Although our Heavenly Father careth for us, He careth for us too much to let us grow negligent and lazy. So do we need wants and wars to keep us near to Him.

Have you ever thought what a blessing our wants are? They are really our wealth, because they are God's opportunity. As at the wedding in Cana, the best thing we have very often is the thing we have not—having no wine they were driven to the Master and got the best. It should be always so. The prominent virtues of our English character are largely due to our much-abused climate. It is the need of a fireside that makes us such a home-loving people—a people whose national anthem is "Home, sweet Home." Sunny skies and soft delicious airs would never have taught us to say that the Englishman's house is his castle. Although we may not be able to sing about the north-east wind as brave Charles Kingsley did, we shall admit that its angry blustering does make one's roof a blessed shelter, and the fireside a sweet retreat; and the front-door is indeed a gate of defence when we can shut it in the face of such a foe. Think of the sea which cuts us off from everywhere—how it has helped to develop our toughness, our courage, our love of freedom. In our education and training as a nation these two things are amongst the most mighty—*wants and wars*. We shall always have gifts enough to keep us thankful. We shall always have wars enough to keep us watchful. Yet abideth these three (sic)—but which of them is the greatest who can tell?

So then let us once for all learn the folly and wickedness of thinking that our wants are tokens of God's forgetfulness, and our foes the sign of God's disfavour. The people of Israel were as dear to God in the wilderness as they were in Canaan. They were as much His chosen and redeemed people when they wanted water as when they were in the goodly land that flowed with milk and honey. The Heavenly Father loves His children on earth as much as He loves them in heaven. Here in the midst of our common needs and in the thick of our foes, He cares as much for us as for those who stand on the sea of glass having gotten the victory. Do not measure God's love by your provisions but by His promises; do not measure His favour by the fewness of your difficulties but by the greatness of His purposes.

And there is another lesson which completes the first—that God never suffers us to have any want which He cannot supply. And that He never brings into any difficulty from which He cannot deliver us.

So let us turn to the story. The people are gathered at Rephidim, and once more there is no water. Angrily the men turn upon Moses, not murmuring only, but even threatening his life. In answer to his prayer Moses is directed to take the elders of Israel, and go before the people, "And behold," said the Lord, "I will stand upon the rock in Horeb." Here as in the case of the manna, there was a special manifestation of the glory of God. All the people were gathered to see this great sight, nearer stood the elders of Israel. In front of these was the rock: high and massive,—its rugged sides stretching up until its fretted heights stood out against the sky. Over all, dazzling and awful, was the glory of the Lord. Then Moses drew near and lifting the rod he smote the rock, and from it leapt the stream. As the psalmist sings, "the waters ran down like rivers,"—cool, delicious, abundant, it fell with happy music. And eagerly

rushed the fevered children, and the thirsty men and women, and found new life in it,—and from every side the flocks and herds gathered to share in the gracious supply.

Looking back upon that scene St. Paul cries—“*that Rock was Christ.*” Good tidings for us pilgrims, going homeward. We are sometimes where Israel was—in the desert, parched, wearied, with faith weak, and ready to murmur, longing for a draught of the river of life, as David longed to drink of the crystal spring by Bethlehem. For us “there is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God.” The scene seems to rise before John the Seer as if this was but the pattern of that which in its fullest glory and complete significance must be seen in the Mount. “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.”

It shall be refreshing and blessed for us to sit awhile by these waters—for us there grows on the side of the river the tree of life bearing twelve manner of fruit.

That Rock was Christ. Let us turn to notice the use that His apostle makes of this emblem. He is warning the Christians of Corinth against being satisfied with privileges. They are not to think that their safety lies in their religious powers. Israel could boast of these. They had their baptism—“*They were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.*” All—the infants as well as the adults: sprinkled by the spray and the rain. The Egyptians were immersed. Israel had their holy communion, too. “They did all eat the same spiritual meat and did all drink the same spiritual drink,”—spiritual in its origin, and in that which it signified—the manna from Heaven, and the water from the Rock. These were their sacraments—*two, not seven*, as Rome boasts. Yet these privileges and observances did not secure their entrance into the promised land, “for with many of them God was not well-pleased, and they were overthrown in the wilderness.”

That Rock was Christ—it is a beautiful emblem of the Blessed Saviour.

Look again upon this noisy rabble fiercely clamouring against God and ready to stone Moses. What miserable forgetfulness of all that had been done for them. The Lord had brought them out of bondage. He had led them across the Red Sea. He had destroyed their enemies. He had fed them with manna. Yet in their black ingratitude all this is forgotten. Utterly blind to all God’s great purpose concerning them, they insult His majesty with their wicked murmuring. What! for rebels like these should the rock melt into streams of pity? And well might it be so—when the Saviour of the world hung on the accursed tree—rejected, despised, crucified. Little wonder that the sun refused to look upon its Maker and shrank from such a scene of horror; and the rocky heart of earth was torn for Him. But who should pity these rebels? Yet, so it is. As the people stand with wondering eyes and parted lips, a great hush resting upon all, Moses smites with the rod and forth leaps the stream of life.

That Rock was Christ. There is another crowd in which you and I are standing, men and women whom God has made for His service: the creatures of His hand, exalted to high position, crowned with glory and honour. Yet we have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Against us the sentence has gone forth. Lift up your eyes unto the hills. What shall we look for but the thunders and lightnings of Sinai? But lo! there cometh forth the glorious Son of God. Stricken and smitten that we may live. Lo! from the pierced side there flowed our life and salvation. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

That Rock was Christ. Come and let us sit in the shadow of this Rock with great delight, and think of the emblem of the Blessed Lord. *What a thing of might it is*—what endurance is here. The river flows for ever, knowing no stay, but how unchangeable is the Rock. These hosts have passed away, nations have risen up into greatness and shaken the world in their might, and gone down into obscurity. Yet to-day explorers think they can find this very rock. The Rock—it is the emblem of the abiding. The centuries find no flaw and leave no decay. I have watched it as the storm-clouds gathered and enwrapped it with darkness, the lightnings flashed about it, the thunders rolled, and the wild winds howled and the torrents leapt down its sides. But lo! the storm was spent, and to-morrow there came the gentle dawn to find it all

unmoved. I have seen it and wondered at its might, away on the coast when the wild waves that have had their way triumphantly for many a league, lift up their heads and catch sight of this barrier. Hissing their rage they have risen arched and majestic, and gathered all their strength, and hurled in rapturous shout against the foe. But lo! only to be dashed into showers of harmless spray, and the streams go hurrying down the rock as if in haste to hide their shame. And to-morrow cooing ripples play about its feet and the sun bathes it with golden light. That Rock was Christ—the Rock of Ages. Let us exult in our glorious Lord. The unchanging Christ: the unchangeable. Be bold in Him. Rest with a blessed sense of safety in Him. Built into this Rock of Ages the rains may beat and winds may blow, but the house of our faith shall stand. It is built on a rock—and more than that *in the Rock*—and this Rock is Christ.

Look up again and note *what sweet touches of tenderness there are about this Rock*. With mighty front defying the storms, with its foundation immeasurably deep—yet what gentleness is here. Look how it flings its generous shadow over the flocks and on the wearied ones that rest in the languid noon. Itself receives the scorching sun that it may yield the shade, catching the fiery darts and quenching them that these may rest in safety. Or when rains beat and winds blow within its depth there is shelter because itself bears the heat and fury of the storm. *That Rock was Christ*. O blessed shelter! O kindly shade! O safest Refuge! He hath borne the heat and burden of the day; about Him has swept the fierceness of the storm. In the crevice of the rock the trembling flower bell finds its home, and the dainty fern springs up in its shade; and in its cleft the bird finds a place for her young and the dove unfearful murmurs its sweet contentment. *That Rock was Christ*. A Rock with clefts wherein we hide. Who can tell of His tenderness. Almighty, and yet how pitiful. Here for the timid soul is shelter and home. Here trust and love can cling safe from every threat.

And yet again look at the Rock as from its smitten side there flows the water for these thirsty thousands. *How abundant it is*. Mr. Moffat tells us that when wandering in South Africa, parched with dreadful thirst, the quick instinct of the cattle told them when water was near, and they would set off in frantic eagerness, and reaching the pool would fight over it and by their splashing spoil the little water that there was. Not so is it here. A river this that flows forth in generous abundance. None needed to go without; none had any difficulty in reaching it. No feeble old man was thrust back by the crowd. No timid woman stood in the outskirts of the multitude. No little children went crying for water. With glorious abundance it came, leaping into delicious music, here spreading out into the still pool; here gathered up for a swift run; here sloping above the fall, and then leaping over it; here laughing about the stones. It is the blessed picture of our salvation—*that Rock was Christ*. In Him is no scanty dole of pardon; no begrudged and niggardly gift. It is a river of salvation, plenteous redemption, waves and billows of forgiveness, an ocean of love. “I have buried thy sins in the depths of the sea.” Soul, if thou comest to the water of life, drink deep, do not sip only, drink, drink, and drink again.

Then it was free. Whosoever would might come and drink. The murmurer’s tongue was cooled by it. The hand that was lifted to stone Moses was laved and cleansed by it. *That Rock was Christ*. The water of life is ours, yours and mine. Everyone that thirsteth may come and welcome. I have read somewhere of some ship in the tropics in which the sailors were perishing with thirst. They had hung up the sail to catch the dew and wring it out. At last they spied a sail in the distance, and hoisted eagerly the flag of distress. The ship hastened to their help, and, as it came near, they cried hoarsely, *Water*. “Water!” was the answer, “why all you have got to do is to *dip it up*. *Dip it up*.” There it was, a good hundred fathoms under them. As far as eye could see, to right of them, and left of them, there was fresh water. They were in the mouth of the Amazon. *Dip it up, dip it up*.

And yet again. *The water followed them*. In all their wanderings it went with them. Wherever the tent was pitched there the babbling brook went in their midst, the crystal river sang beside them, making glad the City of God. So is the influence of that abiding Presence

with us. By night and by day, in all our way, "Lo," saith He, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." *That Rock was Christ.*

Such is the first part of the chapter. We can but lightly touch on the second part. In the first part the Lord is the refuge of His people. In the second part He is their fortress. We must run from our wants to Him; and in Him we must turn and fight our foes. Joshua goes out against the Amalekites, and Moses sits on the rock with hands uplifted to Heaven. And, lo! the victory is Israel's; and the Amalekites are overthrown. So is it that our Captain is at once our Leader upon earth and our Advocate on High, ever at the right hand of God making intercession for us.

And so is it that the chapter which begins with wants and wars, ends with supply and victory.

COMFORT AND REST

EXODUS xviii.

THE last chapter was entitled “Wants and Wars.” The scene was of Israel murmuring for want of water; the manifested glory of God upon the rock; the solemn gathering of Israel and the elders before it; the smiting of the rock and thence the flow of the abundant stream. The chapter ended with the coming of the Amalekites, and Israel’s first battle, and that with a practised and strong foe, knowing every point of vantage and quick to avail themselves of it. But beside that chapter there should always be this: let them stand side by side, the seventeenth and eighteenth of Exodus, for they are the completion of each other. If the first is *Wants and Wars* we may call the second *Comfort and Rest*. Whilst it is true that God loves us too much to let us be independent of Him, yet it is also true that God loves us too much to let us wander through the wilderness without a thousand sweet tokens of His love. If Amalek comes to worry and harass Israel, then comes on the other side the Prince and Priest of the Midianites with kindest greetings and wise counsel. There springs up in the desert a well of love, fresh and beautiful, that must have been peculiarly refreshing to the heart of Moses.

It will be well for us to think of him as he was at this time. We have seen the murmuring host that follows him, ready to lose heart at every threatening ill—ready indeed to stone him in their rage; failing altogether to perceive the great purpose of God concerning their nation, and very slow to follow his guidance. What fellowship could there be between this great leader and his people? A whole heaven above them he stood alone, with scarcely a man that he could call in for counsel or to whom he could entrust any command. Joshua seems to be the only man of kindred spirit. The very training of Moses kept him aloof from these slaves—his ways were not as their ways, nor his thoughts as their thoughts. His sublime faith in God, so miraculously nurtured, so severely disciplined, and again so miraculously confirmed—all this severed him as a man who trod another earth and dwelt beneath another heaven. His life in the court of Pharaoh, his learning in all the varied knowledge of the Egyptians, his courage and skill, his gifts as one “mighty in words and deeds,” his loftiness of thought and purpose—all this was a great gulf between Moses and the people. Think of this man who knew his God and whither He was leading them, in contact with this frightened and grumbling mob, a murmur on their every lip. How wearying and irritating it is to deal with such a set comes out in the life of Sir Frances Drake, that fearless leader of men. “By God’s grace,” he cried, “I can fight the Spaniards, and fevers and storms; but *for a grumbler there is nothing but the yard-arm.*” And there in the rough and ready fashion of that day, the grumbler swung. How greatly would it reduce the population if a similar penalty were attached to grumbling to-day! But think of this Moses all day long amidst a people whom no deliverance, no splendid manifestation of the Divine presence could uplift, much less transform. How wearied he must have been; how sick at heart; how utterly alone. And when the day was done with its clamourings and strifes, does he sit beneath the clear heavens and think sometimes of all that might have been; of all that he had surrendered for Israel’s sake? Do there rise before him visions of Egyptian splendour, scenes that might satisfy the proudest ambition? For these thankless people how much had he given up! And in that loneliness do there come thoughts yet deeper and more tender than these? Does he dream of the wife and children whom he had left in Midian? Were they living still: and should he ever see them again? Thus rises this man of God before us, so lonely, so lofty, so enduring.

Now let us turn to the incident that the chapter records. Across the peninsula of Sinai, on the gulf which bounds the farther side of it, dwelt the nation of the Midianites. Of these at once the prince and priest was Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. Tidings have reached him of the wonderful deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt; and later come the tidings of

the march through the wilderness. The old chief takes with him his daughter Zipporah, the wife of Moses, and her two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, and goes forth to meet the people of Israel. He finds them in the heart of the mountains of Sinai, encamped by *the Mount of God*. Attended doubtless by such a retinue as would mark his dignity as well as secure his safety from wandering hordes, his coming would be a cause of much excitement to Israel. The message is brought to Moses, "Thy father-in-law Jethro is come, and thy wife and two sons." It was a strange greeting to break upon him in so lonely a place. And Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and greeted his wife and sons. And they did ask one another of their welfare; and they came into the tent.

Moses tells them of all that God had done for them. What a story it was—the plagues by which Jehovah had smitten Egypt until proud Pharaoh was compelled to let the people go; the triumphant crossing of the Red Sea; the travail that they had found by the way; and more joyfully he told of how the Lord had delivered them. How sweet it was to forget the toil in these happy memories; to have those about him to whom he could unfold his heart. As Jethro listened he rose up reverently and said, "Blessed be the Lord who hath delivered you out of the hand of Pharaoh. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly He was above them." Then probably whilst all Israel stood watching and worshipping, Jethro took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God. "And Aaron came and all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God." What a picture it is, this holy feast, all joy, all gratitude, all praise. What a contrast to the wants and wars. And sharing as none else could in the joy was Israel's leader with his wife and sons. That is the way in which God gladdens His people. He taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, and in those that hope in His mercy.

The beauty of the scene is completed by the place at which it occurred. When Moses had wandered in the wilderness, leading his flock as the shepherd away to the verge of the desert, there had appeared to him the vision of the burning bush: there God met with him, and gave him the commission for the deliverance of Israel. Moses was appalled by the greatness of the work, and the sense of his own weakness; and cried, "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel?" Then came the gracious answer—"Certainly I will be with thee, and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee. When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt *ye shall serve Me upon this mountain.*" And now as Moses once more comes to the Mount of God there meets him this token of "the goodwill of Him who dwelt in the bush." There it is that they feast together and celebrate the goodness of God.

Very interesting is it to trace the results of this friendship through all the history of Israel. Moses entreats his father-in-law to tarry with them. "And when he was about to depart to his own land and to his own kindred Moses prayed him not to leave them." As the son of the desert he would know his way over the trackless waste, would lead them to the best places for encampment, and "be to them instead of eyes." And for his own sake Moses urges him to stay with them. "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you: Come thou with us and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. . . . And it shall be that what goodness the Lord will do unto us, the same will we do unto thee." For awhile Jethro departs, perhaps to arrange for the journey with Israel, and to select those who should accompany him; for we find the Kenites living henceforth amongst the Israelites, dwelling in tents and drinking no wine—so closely one with Israel, yet retaining their Arab customs, and often distinguished alike for their fidelity to God and to the ways of their fathers.

Again and again the results of this kindly interview shine out from the pages of Scripture. "And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah, into the wilderness of Judah which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people" (Judges i. 16). The memory of the incident lives on long after—"And Saul said unto the Kenites, Go, depart, get you down from the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them: for ye shewed kindness to all the children of Israel when they

came up out of Egypt.” Of this race comes that Jabez who was more honourable than his brethren; and Jonadab whom Jehu took with him when that furious driver went forth to destroy the worshippers of Baal. Their faithfulness to the teaching of their fathers is turned to account by Jeremiah in sharp contrast with Israel’s forgetfulness of God; the prophet goes to the dwelling of the Rechabites and sets pots of wine before them and bids them drink. But these brave abstainers refused. “We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab commanded saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye nor your sons for ever; neither shall ye build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards; but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers.” Their obedience is rewarded of God, and Jonadab the son of Rechab is never to be without a son to stand before the Lord for ever. Dean Stanley tells us that in the final siege of Jerusalem a band of wild Arabs are seen in the streets, dwelling in tents, drinking no wine. They are the children of Jonadab the son of Rechab the Kenite that came of Hamath, the father of the house of Rechab.

And not only pleasant friendship and fellowship was it that Jethro brought to Moses, but some common-sense advice which had much to do with his own comfort and the prosperity of Israel. Jethro sees how that Moses sat all day long to judge the people, from morning until evening. “Why sittest thou by thyself alone?” he asked. *Thyself alone*—it is in keeping with all that we know of the man. The consciousness of a calling quite distinct from those about him in the early years of his life—of a purpose so opposed to the interests of those in the palace of Pharaoh; those long and lonely years in Midian—all the training of his life had taught Moses to keep his own counsel, and to act on his own prompting. At a stroke the wise and venerable Jethro gave him a perfect system of councils—a parish council, with its mayor over from ten to fifteen families; the town council, with its magistrate over hundreds; the county council, with ruler over thousands. And over all was Moses as the judge in all matters of appeal. What a load was taken off the shoulders of the leader; and what a blessing set upon the shoulders of the others. Now Moses may go on his way another man; now he shall live to bring the people to the verge of the goodly land, his eye not dimmed, nor his natural force abated.

So stand the chapter of the comfort and rest beside that of the wants and wars. God is glad to light our lives with friendship and kindly counsel. Wants and wars there may be, but there shall be too the comfort and rest with which our Father doth refresh His children in the wilderness.

WE reach in this chapter the record of the greatest event in the life of Moses. It was much indeed that he should rise up from the midst of the splendours of Pharaoh's court and step forth from that high position to become one with these poor enslaved and spirit-broken Israelites. It was much, very much, that he should be called of God, and commissioned to demand the release of Israel, and to bring them out from the house of their bondage. It was much that he should have stood and spoken to the waters of the Red Sea in the name of Jehovah, and have taken so great a part in Israel's deliverance and the overthrow of Egypt's hosts. It was much that he should have led so vast a multitude in the trackless wilderness. But of all honours ever put upon man, this surely was the greatest—*the law was given by Moses*. If the supreme advantage of the Jew was that to him were committed the oracles of God, how great was his honour to whom it was given to climb the Mount of God, to enter into the majesty of the Divine presence, and to receive from the Almighty those tables of the law which were to inspire and shape the religious life of the world.

Every aspect of the scene demands our earnest and careful consideration.

I. *The greatness of the event appears if we recall the purpose of God in regard to His people.* The whole history of Israel, their origin and their training, is that God may have in them a nation through whom He can declare His mind and will to the world. They are to be His witnesses. The law of God was to become incorporated with the very life of the people. It was to be wrought into the fibre of their being; and to control the whole round of their life to its minutest details. Canaan whither they were going was the chosen home of a chosen people; it was "the vineyard fenced about" as Isaiah calls it; but this was the vine out of Egypt, and here the Heavenly Husbandman creates the vine; Canaan was to develop and mature that which was implanted in the hearts of Israel at Sinai. The great life-purpose of this people begins with the giving of the law.

II. *Notice further that all the previous dealings of God with Israel have been a preparation for this.* God did not begin with the commandments. He first made them free, and then He gave them the law. The whole history is a striking illustration of St. Paul's words, "Being made free from sin, we became the servants of righteousness." It is impossible for us to think of Israel beginning to keep these great commandments in Egypt. We need only recall their ignorance of God, and their utter misery. It is impossible to get faith when hope is dead. Workers in missions will tell you that to create hope is the first and hardest thing—to stir men out of the awful apathy of a dulled and stupefied despair. Then we have to remember how their surroundings were full of heathenism with its vice and degradation. The cruelty of the taskmasters would have found a new strength and bitterness if they had been provoked by the insult done to the gods of Egypt. The religion of Jehovah might live in such conditions, but it is very difficult to conceive of the Jewish religion *commencing* under such conditions. First of all, God brings hope. He brings liberty. He smites at the chains of their bondage. He as their Champion takes up their case and proves Himself to be their Friend and Deliverer. He manifests His greatness in acts which must have appealed most powerfully to their imagination, and made even their passions, which seem to have been the only elements of energy left in them, to take the side of faith in Himself. The terrors of God as seen in the plagues of Egypt, the thunder and lightning and hail, the death of the firstborn, must have turned the very fear of the slaves—the faculty most readily appealed to—into confidence in God. By the sudden and complete deliverance from the perils which hemmed them in on every hand at the Red Sea, there was inspired a new faith and yet a greater sense of triumph. And not only in such scenes of greatness and power did the God of Israel reveal Himself. The wilderness with its dreary stretch where was neither bread nor water had compelled them to

look up for their daily supply; and unfailingly had been given the manna from heaven; and the river from the rock followed them. Day by day and night by night there rose before them the pillar of God's presence, their guide, their guard, their glory. So had He made Himself known to them.

And so is it that our God deals with us. He reveals Himself as our Father before He asks our obedience. He teaches us of Himself as caring for us with all love and tenderness before He asks our faith. "His Gospel comes to us even before His law," as Dr. Dale says.

This is the ground on which God bases His appeal to Israel for their obedience. "Thus shalt thou say to the house of Israel, and tell the children of Israel; ye have seen what I did with the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are world which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (vv. 3, 4, 5, 6).

III. *Very remarkable is the fitness of the place with the majesty of the scene.*

Dean Stanley has pictured it with such vividness and force that I cannot refrain from giving his description. "Onwards and upwards after their long halt (at Rephidim). Exulting in their first victory, they advanced deeper and deeper into the mountain ranges they knew not whither. They knew only it was for some great end, for some mighty sacrifice, for some solemn disclosure, such as they had never before witnessed. Onwards they went and the mountains closed around them; upwards through winding valley and under higher cliff and over rugged pass and through gigantic forms; and at last through all the different valleys, the whole body of the people were assembled. On their right hand and on their left rose long successions of lofty rocks, forming a vast avenue, like the approaches which they had seen leading to the Egyptian temple between colossal figures of men and gods. At the end of this broad avenue, rising immediately out of the level plain on which they were encamped, towered the massive cliffs of Sinai, like the huge altar of some natural temple, encircled by peaks of every shape and height, the natural pyramids of the desert. In this sanctuary, secluded from all earthly things, raised high even above the wilderness itself, arrived, as it must have seemed to them, at the very end of the world, they waited for the revelation of God." . . . "That such a plain should exist at all in front of such a cliff is so remarkable a coincidence with the sacred narrative as to furnish a strong internal argument, not merely of its identity with the scene, but of the scene having been described by an eye-witness. The awful and lengthened approach, as to some natural sanctuary, would have been the fittest preparation for the coming scene. The low line of alluvial mounds at the foot of the cliff exactly answers to the 'bounds' which were to keep the people off from 'touching the Mount.' The plain itself is not broken and uneven and narrowly shut in like almost all others in the range, but presents a long retiring sweep against which the people could 'remove and stand afar off.' The cliff rising like a huge altar in front of the whole congregation, and visible against the sky in lonely grandeur from end to end of the whole plain, is the very image of 'the Mount that might be touched,' and from which the 'voice' of God might be heard far and wide over the stillness of the plain below." *SINAI and PALESTINE by Dean Stanley - pp. 42, 43.

In such a place, so strangely fitted for such an occasion, the hosts of Israel are gathered. For three days their expectation has been quickened, and their minds have been solemnized by the preparation for the great event. They move under the hush and awe of some coming mystery, all the more impressive because it is so unique. Now breaks the morning of the third day. And on the high cliff that rises up to heaven there gather the black clouds. Now lightnings play incessant, and the tempest sweeps and roars. The scene is one of sublime majesty. "There were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the Mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that were in camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God: and they stood at the nether part of the Mount. And Mount Sinai was altogether in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole Mount quaked greatly."

Then forth from the depth of the darkness and in the midst of the terrors came the voice Divine in the ears of all the people.

“God spake these words and said: I am the Lord thy God: thou shalt have none other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make to thyself the likeness of anything in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth: thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them.”

And all the people saw the thunderings and the lightnings and noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking.

The scene is set before the people long after in the words of Moses (Deut. iv. 9, 10, 11, 12). And yet much longer afterward the author of the Epistle of the Hebrews places the scenes of Sinai and Sion side by side (Heb. xii. 18-24)—“For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assemble and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel”

So was the law given by Moses. But grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. What contrast could be greater? Look forth again upon the lonely wilderness, far from the haunts of men and every trace of life. Let the rugged height of Sinai rise before us, awful in its solitude. Again let us listen to the roll of thunders, and let the lightnings blaze about us. Then let us hasten away to the lake of Galilee; the houses thickly cluster about the shore, and the fishing boats dot the surface of the lake. Here is another mount—how all unlike the Mount of Sinai—gay with the flowers, the red and white and lilac, and the golden lily everywhere. The song of the birds fills all the air. We look forth upon the scene of beauty arched by the deep blue sky, and the blue waters of the lake stretching away to the distant hills. All peace, all gladness, as if God had spoken His own *Fear not* to the earth. And here in the quiet morning sits the lowly Prophet of Nazareth, and He opened His mouth from Heaven and taught them saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” In the singing of the birds and in the beauty of the flowers He finds the lessons of the Father; He comes to cure our very care, to heal our anxieties. “Be not anxious,” saith He; “your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” And lo! as we sit at His feet we find grace and truth. In Him is the mind and will of God as nothing else can declare it. And in Him is grace to be that which we see; grace to do that which we hear; grace that this light from Heaven may become the very life on earth. Not less but more binding than the law of Moses is the love of Jesus Christ. Love is the most sacred obligation. Love makes law no more a law—yet multiplies a thousand times its power and authority. A glad *I will*: and overwhelming *I must*. No choice, no thought, but to do His will—an utter and complete surrender. “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

THE ANGEL AND THE WAY

"Behold, I send an Angel before thee." —EXODUS xxiii. 20.

"By little and little." —ver. 30

IT is almost startling to come upon these words here, *By little and little*. God has come down in such sublime majesty as earth had ever seen. The Scriptures speak of the law as given by the ministry of the angels, and the psalmist sings, "the chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place." Amidst such dread sway of splendour the great purpose of Israel has been declared;—the redeemed of the Lord, they are to go forth as His people. The great principles which are to govern them have been laid down: the laws by which all nations are to be regulated, relating to persons and property as well as to religion, have been proclaimed. Now let them go up and take possession of the goodly land. Why should they delay?

Then in the twentieth verse of the chapter there comes a sudden change, in which precepts give place to promises. The law sinks into gracious tendencies; instead of the stern *thou shalt* and *thou shalt not*, there comes the gracious word, *"Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared."* . . . *"Little by little will I drive them out before thee, till thou be increased and inherit the land."* And if, like Israel, we ask of the Angel—"Tell me, I pray thee thy name"—this surely is the answer, *"The Angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old"* (Isaiah lxiii. 9.).

There are here two lessons which we shall do well to treasure. First, *That God never gives His law without His angel*. Second, *That His angel leads us little by little into the possession which is prepared for us*.

I. God never gives His law without His angel. The two are never separated. God's will is never severed from His power. Duty is always hand in hand with strength. Right and might keep step and time. If ever there is revealed to us the goodness that should be, look again, and waiting close at hand is the grace that it may be. So even of old time came grace and truth. Moses gave the law, but there came Another who could turn the law into life and into love.

It is a perilous thing to separate the law of God from the angel of His presence. There is a twofold peril. Together with the law we need that Presence to keep us from Pharisaism on the one hand, and from despair on the other. Look at the two men of whom the blessed Master tells us, who went up into the temple to pray. The Pharisee sunning his righteousness in the full blaze of day, and in the eyes of the admiring crowd—exact in his dress, in his look, in his tone, in his attitude, he stood and *prayed thus with himself*—"God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, or even as this publican. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get." The other is all guilt and despair; he seems to hear every commandment clamouring aloud for his condemnation. With head hung down he could but smite upon his breast and cry, *"God be merciful to me, the sinner."* On the one side stands the man who had kept the law and it had clothed him with self-righteousness. Listen to the I, I, I—all a flashing, polished capital I. This was the origin of that black and hopeless Pharisaism at which the Lord of Heaven hurled His terrible denunciation. Of all pride this is the most accursed—the pride of religion, the conceit of goodness. If a man carries a heart of stone with the ten commandments graven upon it, how proud shall he be who is so religious; yet how hard, how pitiless, how scornful. And if on the other hand the law do but bring me in all the dread majesty of Heaven its stern *thou shalt* and *thou shalt not*, alas how vainly do I struggle in my own strength to obey. I hear but the thunders of Sinai; I read the words by the lightnings that terrify me. But lo! after the terrors of fire and earthquake and whirlwind there comes a still small voice—*Behold, behold I send My Angel before thee*. Then the word law is melted into love: then piety is one with pity; then righteousness becomes an eager longing to help and bless others. Look at Saul of Tarsus—as

touching the law blameless—yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter; consenting to the death of Stephen, binding and delivering into prison both men and women. But then comes the angel of God's Presence and how transformed is he. Listen to the words which he writes to the Church of Thessalonica—"We were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherisheth her own children: even so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were well pleased to impart unto you not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were become very dear to us. . . . Ye know how we dealt with each one of you, as a father with his own children, exhorting you and encouraging you." Here is no more only the hard table of the law, but in him lives and moves the Angel of His Presence.

Let this be our strength and joy that the two do always go together. I look at the law, divided by its numerals, hard and exact. And I, so foolish, so forgetful, so fickle, so false, how can I keep in innermost spirit the commandment of the Most High? *To will* is present with me, *sometimes*; but my will needs another, truer, holier will to be brought into it. There starts before me the picture of some little lad at school. Before him is the hard question in arithmetic. All these black letters and rigid figures—they have no eyes that can pity; no lips that can smile, no hands that can help—nothing that can put any hope into the little fellow's heart. Fixed, hard, stony, the figures are set down on the slate, but all is confusion and failure. The sum is blotted and smeared. Everything is wrong. And now the little lad despairs. It is no good his trying. What does the little one want? Not the master who draws a cross over it all and thunders angrily—that will only make it harder than ever. Here comes some gentle mistress who takes the poor little scholar on her knee, and holds the little hand in hers. How different the question is when she speaks it; she seems to take off all its hardness, and the figures seem to lose their dreadfulness when she puts them down. She talks as if the poor little scholar were not such a dreadful dunce after all. Hope comes into the heart from that cheery presence. Step by step they go through it together—mistakes are patiently pointed out and corrected. At last there it is—triumphantly right. The little lad looks up with beaming eyes and thinks he could do anything with somebody like this to help him always. "There," cries the cheery teacher, "you must always ask me to help you when you can't get on, you know."

These tables of stone—they have no pity, no help; no softening words of explanation. That is not all. It never can be all. Our God cannot only give us laws. "Behold, I send my Angel." Not only comes that stern *thou shalt* from without, but within there is a holy prompting, the whispered hope, the strengthening with might of His Spirit; the tenderness; and our confidence grows sound and triumphant until we cry, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." For us this word is spoken. Let our hearts be glad and sing aloud with this assurance—"Behold I send My Angel before thee to keep thee and lead thee into the land which I have prepared."

The second part completes the exquisite tenderness of the lesson. *Little by little the Angel of God's Presence leads us up to inherit what is prepared for us.*

It is much indeed that the infinite God can find any place in His thoughts for that which is little. It seems scarcely in keeping with our ideas of might and majesty to do that which is little. Leading so favoured a people, for whom so great things had been done, to whom such great purposes were entrusted, we look for a triumph swift, splendid, complete, as when of old He said, Let there be light, and light was. But not so is it. *Little by little* they are to be led.

Is not this the only way in which Israel can be brought unto the knowledge of God, and into the way of His commandments? The idea of holiness cannot be created by words spoken amidst such majesty as that of Sinai. Gradually it must be revealed, and deepened, and developed. The idea of sin cannot be created by thunders and lightnings and the voice as of a great trumpet. These may fill the soul with terror, awe, remorse, despair. But the grace of penitence is of another origin and nature. The thoughts of the better life, and the longings and efforts after it are of slow and subtle growth. So is it that the people of Israel had to dwell amidst symbols, sacrifices, priests, altars, until *little by little* they should learn the facts of sin, of atonement, and cleansing. Little by little—it is the only way of teaching anything. The

master who should think himself too great to teach his scholars their A B C will never get his scholars any farther. Our Heavenly Father makes ladders for us up to Himself, as Jacob saw in his vision of old, and with little steps that little feet can climb. If we wait, as many do, until we can fly, we shall never get up to Him at all.

Look at the example of the Blessed Lord—how gradually He revealed the truth to His disciples as they were able to hear it. He began with parables—and with miracles which are but acted parables. Thus He gained their confidence, and enlarged their expectation, and later taught them of His divinity, of His crucifixion, of His resurrection, and of the mission to the Gentiles.

Little by little.—How few of the world's greatest leaders would ever have attempted anything if at the outset they had seen all that their work involved, and if they had seen whither their way would lead. If Luther and Wesley had seen the end of their work at its beginning, it is impossible to think that they would have dared to begin it. God lets us see the sunny distance on the mountains afar off, but lets the mists lie over the valley between. One of John Wesley's ablest critics has complained that he lacked what he calls the retro-prospective faculty—the stepping back that he might look forward; the steeping outside his work that he might see it all. That defect was his best gift. It was only because he saw a day at a time that he went on. If we saw too much of our work at once, we should either be impatient of the processes that lead to success; or we should despair in face of all that it was to cost. If you could tell a child beginning to walk that he would have to walk as far as round the world if he lived to be twenty years of age, the little one might be too frightened to begin. And yet an average of four miles a day for seventy years would convey us more than four times round the world.

Little by little—there is in the words a godlike confidence and patience. We hinder most frequently perhaps by our eagerness. We are afraid of contingencies, accidents. We have no faith, and therefore want to get the thing finished and done with. I fear many families—especially among religious people—are spoiled because we want to turn out finished ideals at the beginning. We think we can run the poor little children into moulds like jellies and turn them out exactly according to the desired pattern. But we cannot. Human nature is not made that way. There is an individuality in it—a capital I, that you only stiffen if you defy, and that you cannot ignore. We must adopt God's method, and have faith in the power of quiet influences, unmarked and unmeasured, accumulating day after day. I met the other day with a very interesting paper on cumulative vibration. Amongst the experiments described was one in which a weight of half a ton was suspended, and against it in short and regular intervals a little ball of cork hung by a silken thread was struck. Little by little the vibration set up by the light touch of the ball spread throughout the mass until it was set in motion. Little by little—it is the noiseless and infinitely gentle and gracious way in which God deals with us.

And notice in conclusion the *law of possession* that is here laid down—"By little and little I will drive them out before thee, unto thou be increased and inherit the land." *Increase and inherit*—that is the law—God only gives us what we can occupy and turn to account. There can be no absentee landlord. "I want more earth," cried the plant. "Well," says Nature, "push your roots out farther and down deeper and you shall find it." "I want more of light and air," it cried again. "Very well," came the answer, "push up the stem, and unfold leaf and flower, and it is yours." The only way to get more is to *grow* more. *Increase and inherit*. We only possess what we use.

THE VISION OF GOD

"They saw God, and did eat and drink." —EXODUS xxiv. 11.

THERE is very much in this chapter that should claim our meditation, and that cannot fail to minister to our spiritual life. It is well to remind ourselves of that which we need constantly to recall in the Old Testament, that its study is not a matter of antiquarian research, interesting as a record of what happened so many hundreds of years ago. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scripture might have hope." This chapter is certainly within that "whatsoever," and is especially interesting as containing the record of the first Scripture, and the first reference to the Book of God. In the fourth verse we read: *And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord.* "The origin of the first portion of Holy Scripture that ever existed as such, whatever writings may now or afterwards have been incorporated in the Pentateuch" (Chadwick). And again in the seventh verse we read, *And Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the audience of the people.* So begins the writing and so begins the reading of the Book of the Lord.

We cannot but dwell for a minute or two at this point. Here springs up that river whose streams make glad the City of God. From this point it flows like the rivers of Eden, north, south, east and west; and of it we may say "that it compasseth the whole land where there is gold: and the gold of that land is good." Stand at the spring, and think of the myriads who have drunk of the stream by the way, and have lifted up the head. Think how many have been made wise unto salvation; what doubts have been dispelled; what revelations have been given; what faith has been inspired; what triumphs won! Whithersoever the river cometh there is life. Over the spring which is the beginning of the river Thames there is set, I believe, a cross to mark the origin of the stream that flows by the greatest city of the world, bearing the products of all nations, and which for historic interest and mercantile importance outpasses all the rivers of the world. Well we may set a mark here. Here is the beginning of the written Word. Here is the beginning of the Book of God.

But that which most of all arrests our attention in this chapter is the record of THE VISION OF GOD.

Then went up Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: and they saw the God of Israel: and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the very heaven for clearness. (R.V.) They saw God and did eat and drink.

It will be well for us to recall the account of the vision of God with which the sojourn of Israel at Sinai commences. Turn to the nineteenth chapter and the sixteenth verse. *And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. . . . And Mount Sinai was altogether in a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the mount quaked greatly.* And again in the twentieth chapter and the eighteenth verse, *And all the people saw the thunders, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.* And, lo, we turn to the thirty-fourth chapter and there comes this wonderful change: *They saw God.* Here is no terror; no flying from His presence; no awe; no peril—they saw God and did eat and drink. Here is rest. Here is satisfaction. Here is companionship. What has wrought so great a change? It is like that of which Isaiah sings, "O Lord, Thou wast angry with me." The black clouds gathered, there flashed the lightnings terrible, and the thunders shook the very earth: the wild rains swept down the hillsides and

the whirlwind raged in its fury. Thou wast angry. But now is Thine anger turned away. The clouds are broken up, shot through with sunshine and edged with gold; the blue sky spreads overhead; the very rain has hung the trees with gems and sown the grass with orient pearls. All nature bursts into a new song and the music rings on every side. *Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortedst me.*” Such is the very figure of the change here. The sapphire blue is in place of the darkness and smoke; the clearness of the very heaven is in place of the fire. What lies between the two that can explain the change?

Before we find the answer let us notice that the natural thought of God is precisely that which first met Israel at Sinai. The symbols that set Him forth are lightnings, thunders, fire. The very thought of God is terror: His presence is a torment. But lo, God speaks. They who come nearest and listen do discern in the words of His law an order, a rightness; he that hath ears to hear perceives running through the commandments the presence of One who comes down to gird life with security, and to crown it with blessedness. There is a care which bends over the man and his family and all belonging to him, that makes them sacred. The Almighty sets Himself for the protection of the weak, and for the maintenance of the right against the wrong-doer everywhere. That is the beginning of the vision of God. He is no arbitrary sovereign sitting on the throne of the universe, demanding obedience to His own will under threat of pains and penalties. He saith, “Come, let us reason together.” He deals with us as those whose confidence must be won. The law cannot show us God, but the law can and does show us the righteousness and beneficence and wisdom of God. The law cannot show us God, but without the law we cannot know God. *God spake unto the people*: that was the beginning of the vision. It always is. God reveals Himself to us first of all in His Word. We must hear His voice, or we cannot so much as lift up our eyes unto heaven. He must speak to us that we may learn to speak to Him. He who does not hear God cannot see Him: to hear aright is to begin to see.

The next step was *the surrender of themselves to the will of God*. “And Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said we will do, and be obedient.” There must be a deep earnest purpose of obedience; the will must be set on God’s side before the vision can be ours. This is ever the next step in the vision.

But this is not all. *There is the building of the altar*. Around it are set twelve stones, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then the sacrifices are brought to the altar and slain upon it, and half the blood is sprinkled on the altar, and half the blood is sprinkled on the people. That is the next step. There is need for us to consider it carefully. We can scarcely fail to hear the word of God; we all have something of that gracious prompting of the Holy Spirit which shapes itself in a purpose of obedience. But we may stop short of the altar and the sacrifice. This great truth runs through the whole Book from Genesis to Revelation—*without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins*. I may not be able to say why it should be so; my perceptions of righteousness, alas, are dulled; but no man can honestly go through this Book without finding that no vision of God can be ours without the altar, and the sacrifice and the sprinkled blood. It meets us at the very outset. Cain and Abel come to worship—the one with the first-fruits of the earth, the other with a lamb for a burnt offering. To the one is given no token of acceptance; to the other comes the light of God’s favour. It meets us through all the pages of the Scriptures until in the last book we hear the song of the redeemed who have gone up into the Mount and do see God, and eat and drink: “Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood.” And as we hope to be amongst those blessed ones, we ask, “Who are these, and whence came they?” The answer comes, “These are they which have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The cloud of darkness can never give place to the sapphire blue of Heaven until the sacrifice is brought and the blood is sprinkled. This and this only is the way up to the Vision of God—the word heard, the will surrendered, past the altar whereon the sacrifice is laid for our sins; then came the vision,—*they saw God and did eat and drink*. Before them rose some symbol of His presence, and into their heart was borne a consciousness of His favour. He brought them into His banqueting chamber, and His banner over them was love. No blinding and bewildering glory was it that

met them, but they entered into the Father's House where was bread enough and to spare. God was graciously at home with them, and they were at home with Him. In His presence they found repose, refreshment, gladness. This is what our God would be to us, a resting-place, a home, to which we pass up out of the bewildering mysteries of life. We are to know the blessed shelter of His presence, to hide under the shadow of His wings, compassed with His favour as with a shield. We are to rest and delight ourselves in Him.

Now let us turn to the Epistle to the Hebrews, the tenth chapter and the nineteenth verse, *Having therefore boldness (or liberty) to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.* How much more gloriously may the vision of God be ours than it could be theirs! No man hath seen God at any time; the Only-Begotten which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him. If in the law there are such hints and whispers of God's pity and righteousness and love, what vision is ours since He hath spoken to us by His Son! What measure of love, what fulness of grace do meet us in Him! If as men listened to His voice in the law they made answer, "All that the Lord hath spoken will we do," what reply is ours? If of old the sacrifice and sprinkled blood availed to fit men for the vision of God, what waits for us when we enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus! If in that dim dawn and misty morning they saw the sapphire blue and the glory of God's presence, and did eat and drink, what high privilege is ours since He is with us in whom dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily! How much closer and sweeter and richer and fuller is the intimacy that may be ours. For us, if we will have it, is that abiding Presence, that vision of God undimmed and unbroken. "If a man love Me he will keep My words, and My Father will love him; and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." So in Jesus Christ may that vision of God be ours, for ever leaving us fitted for yet further and fuller revelation of God to the soul.

THE STORY OF THE GOLDEN CALF

EXODUS xxxii. ; DEUT. ix. 7-21 ; PSA. cvi. 19-23.

IN this incident we have the record of what must have been to Moses the supreme trial of his life, and the manifestation of Israel's deepest sinfulness. Yet it is the opportunity of bringing out the greatness of the man's character. He shows a sublimity of devotion to Israel such as stands unapproached save in the cry of the Crucified Saviour—"Father, forgive them: they know not what they do."

The people are still at Sinai. Upon the Mount there lingered the cloud of the Divine Presence. Within them lived the memory of that dread appearance when God descended amidst the thunder and lightnings, and the people fell before Him in awe. Into their inmost souls had sounded those words—"I am the Lord thy God: thou shalt have none other gods but Me." Every restraint—authority, fear, threatening, promise—held them back from the sin of idolatry. Yet all these restraints were broken through, and at the very foot of Sinai they made the golden calf and worshipped it. In the black list of rebellions with which Israel provoked God this was the most outrageous. How vividly it lives in the memory of Moses, and how the soul is stirred with indignation as he recalls it, appears long years afterwards when he says—"In Horeb ye provoked the Lord to wrath so that the Lord was angry with you to have destroyed you."

The two characters in the chapter are Moses and Aaron. The contrast between the two is very striking. Side by side you have the might of the man who sees God, and lives in the consciousness of His Presence; and the helplessness of the man who stands alone. The whole story is a commentary on the text—"Seeing Him who is invisible."

I. The man who sees God is a hero.

For forty days Moses and Joshua have been in the Mount of God. Aaron has been left in charge of Israel. To these people, timid and superstitious as they were, this prolonged absence would be full of terrible thought, and soon the lawlessness of the people began to show itself. This idolatry was doubtless but the height and climax of the turbulence of the people. Men do not suddenly reach such an extreme. Day after day the host grew more restless and riotous. The ringleaders see their opportunity and are quick to avail themselves of it. So came at last the terrible crisis. Moses was gone, they knew not whither—up in that mountain, the home of the lightnings and thunder, it may well be that he has perished. Deserted and deceived, led up into a wilderness, mocked by promises of a goodly land flowing with milk and honey—shall they too perish here! They gather about Aaron with the demand—"Up, make us gods which shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." Amidst this clamouring host, with flashing eyes and furious voices, the blasphemous cry spreading on every side, what shall Aaron do? They are ready to kill him if he oppose or seem to delay; a mob so mad has neither reason nor pity. One man who can stand against such a multitude, so excited, so determined, must be a man indeed. But, you ask, is not such heroism a matter of *nature*, of *character*, for which the man is not responsible so much as the race and family from which he comes, or the accident that determines our individuality? Aaron was no doubt a man well qualified for some positions, you say—could indeed do well in his place, and better even than Moses, but he was not fitted for such a difficulty as this. I admit the difference of natural capacity, and the force of inherited qualities. Certainly Aaron never had the training of Moses: never had the call, and the commission. I would not blame the blind man for not painting; or the deaf man that he cannot make sweet music; or the timid man that he is no warrior. But suppose Aaron, whilst

this mob had surged about him, *had seen God, high and lifted up*. Suppose in his soul there had been the deep consciousness—*“Thou art God and there is none else.”* Would it not have made him strong, defiant, triumphant? *The people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits*. Look at the heroes whose stories are recorded in this Book. It is not from nature that they get their heroism, but by faith in God. GIDEON hesitates and pleads his feebleness, but this was his watchword,—*“Have not I sent thee: go in this thy might.”* MOSES himself shrank with an utter dread from the commission to lead Israel; and found his strength only in the promise—*“Certainly I will be with thee.”* Look at grand old LUTHER. Had not a flash of lightning frightened him out of the professor’s chair into a monastery? But now he has learned that *“the just shall live by his faith,”* and he puts his foot down in defiance of pope and councils and devils. “Here I stand: I can do no other—God help me.” It is written—*“by faith out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the alien”* (Heb. 11:34).

Look again at Aaron amidst these hosts—weak, irresolute, afraid. Listen to him as with faltering voice he bids them bring him the golden earrings, the tokens of their great deliverance from Egypt. Swiftly they are brought and laid at his feet. Look at him as he gathers this glittering pile and makes ready to melt it and mould it, and fashion it in the image of a calf.

Turn from all this to another scene. The people are in the wild intoxication of their mad revel. Then Moses comes down the mountain side and he stands in the gate of the camp. One man—a *man of God*. Instantly a great burst of terror fell on all as they saw him, for in his presence they saw Another. That which a man habitually sees, others do come to see in him and through him. Then out upon that stillness rang the voice of Moses—*“Who is on the Lord’s side?”* The Lord’s side—that was the whole difference between these two. To Aaron it was this rebel host against one man. To Moses it was this host against the Lord. “Who is on the Lord’s side?” Instantly round about him gathered the sons of Levi. Then as the trembling people listened they heard the command—*“Thus saith the Lord God of Israel. Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother.”* And the revelling of the idolaters gave place to the cries of the stricken and the host of the terrified. Such punishment, terrible as it was, alone could stay this madness of the people. And there fell of the people about three thousand men.

Look at it again—the contrast between these two men. One man with God to help him is never in a minority and never can be. This is the might of Moses the man of God, and the might of God’s people always—*seeing Him*. PETER, frightened Peter, is made a hero when he sees Him high and lifted up. He who sees God may walk the earth assured of victory: measuring duty and difficulty and every enterprise by the might of the Almighty. Oh, to live in this triumphant assurance—*“God is our Refuge and Strength: a very present Help!”*

II. See again, *The man who sees God is the master of circumstances.*

Turn to this Aaron once more. Facing him Moses cries indignantly, “What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?” Mark where Moses lays the responsibility—*“thou has brought so great a sin upon them.”* And trembling Aaron said, “Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people that they are set on mischief. For they said, Make us gods which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, we wot not what has become of him. And I said, Whosoever hath any gold let them break it off. So they gave it me, and I cast it into the fire, *and there came out this calf.*”

There came out this calf! Poor helpless Aaron. “It was not my fault, you see, not at all, I really could not help it. You were gone, and stayed so long that they thought you never would come back again. And I—all I did was to fling their gold into the fire: *and—and—there—came—out—this—calf.*”

Well, but after all, you say, are we not the creatures of circumstance, if not indeed its slave. “Circumstance, that unspiritual god,” as BYRON says, who can tell how largely we are shaped by grim necessity?

Let us admit the force of circumstances. Yet in this Book I hear of man as one who is crowned with honour and glory: made to have dominion. Then I find elsewhere thoughts of man as a bubble flung upon a wave, tossed hither and thither as winds may chance to blow. Which is the true estimate of life? Are we after all mere lumps of clay shaped by the hands of fate to honour or dishonour? Well, here is the slave of circumstances. "All I did was to light a fire *and there came out this calf*. Blame the fire that was so perverse; blame the gold that took so ill a shape; but do not blame me."

But turn to this other man—the *man of God*. In his rage he digs a furnace. He kindles a fire. It is as if his very soul were in these tongues of flame that leap to heaven. And into the midst of the fiery furnace he flings the calf—the molten idol of the people. And lo! it came out a shapeless mass. And he bade men break it in pieces. And others were set to grind it with stones until the thing was dust. And then he bare it to the brook, and cast it into the bubbling stream, and turning in scorn to the people he bade them go and drink the god whom they had worshipped. Look at it. Out of the one fire came that which made Israel sin; and out of the other came the destruction of Israel's idol. So is the man of God: one having dominion over circumstances. Many things are there that he cannot control. But one thing he can do, and will: *No circumstances shall force him to sin: and no circumstances shall ever compel him to lead other people to sin*. It is a sight to look at—the man *who sees God*, and in the strength of that vision is master of circumstances. Servant of God, then fearing nothing. He can let his nay be nay, and his yea, yea. He need not explain, nor apologise. Oh, how great a gap there is between these two men, the slave of circumstances and their master! If ever man had a set of circumstances to deal with, incessant, threatening, overwhelming, that man was St. Paul. Yet listen to his boast. See how he stands and lets them come in all their swords about him. How he challenges the host and laughs his untroubled defiance. Tribulation, the giant thresher with the flail upon his shoulder; grim Famine, who would starve him into surrender; Persecution bares its dripping sword; Distress pots a thousand ills. But there beside his Lord, hand in with Him, he cries—"*In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*" (Romans 8:31-39).

III. *The man who sees God, sees all things rightly.*

Look again at these two men and compare their estimate of this deed. Aaron's word seems to imply that he made very light of the matter. "Really," he seems to say, "do not get angry about a little thing like this. The people brought me their earrings and I cast them into the fire—and there came out this calf. Surely it cannot matter whether the gold has one shape or another, a mere bit of gold—what harm is there in that?"

Ah, how easy it is to get rid of sin if only you can get rid of God. It is hard to know black from white when there is no light. Right and wrong do lose their very meaning apart from the authority of the Most High. *There came out this calf*—that was all Aaron saw. But Moses sees that of which he can only speak again and again as "*a great sin.*" To him it was the heaping up of all that was blasphemous and insulting to the God of heaven. "They turned the glory of God into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass." They celebrated with all the foulness of the Egyptian idolatry the worship of this image which was to take the place of the Almighty. It is only the man who lives in the light of God who can see the meaning of things. Only in the clear white light of God can a man see the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the beauty of holiness. The man of God comes to see things as God sees them, and He sees them as they are.

Lastly, *The man who sees God is the true servant and deliverer of the people.*

"It came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now will I go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make atonement for your sin."

The world often resents the presence of the man of God; they think him hard, narrow, unsympathetic. They think of him as a man to whom pleasure is a sin, and who wants to see the world made melancholy that it may be thought pious. But see how that it is in the man of God that there lives the most passionate devotion to the welfare of the people. Aaron lays the

blame upon them. But Moses intercedes for them, and would take the penalty of their sin upon himself. Listen as in his love for the people he pleads—"I pray Thee forgive them: If not,—blot me out from the Book which Thou hast written." He will give his life for this people—his very existence; his hope of that future glory which was to be the recompense of reward for all that he had forsaken on earth.

How little the world knows, or perhaps the Church either, of the deliverances that are wrought for it by these men of God—men who rise up like the lightning conductors, drawing harmlessly to earth that which would have lingered into the destroying bolt. Who can tell how many averted judgments prayer has obtained. I would not for a moment darken or bedim the infinite love of God. His love indeed may have appointed these very deliverers, but I would magnify the power of intercessory prayer. See it in the case of LOT in Sodom, when the destroying angel cried, "I can do nothing until thou be come thither." What is it that surrounds this man as with an atmosphere of safety amid these perils? "*It came to pass that when God overthrew the cities of the plain that he remembered Abraham and delivered Lot.*"

For our little round of life as well as for such sublime work as Moses had to accomplish this is the true condition—that we live as seeing Him who is invisible.

Aaron was *a religious man*—very religious, a man having to do with most solemn services, and to lead the worship of the people. True, a man may be very religious indeed, and yet he may not live seeing God; he may not carry with him the consciousness of God's presence. Only he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High can *abide* under the shadow of the Almighty.

Aaron was a religious man: but Moses was a man of God.

THE FAITHFUL MEDIATOR

“And it came to pass on the morrow that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for you.” —EXODUS xxxii. 30.

THE great sin of Israel in worshipping the golden calf is not by any means to be lightly passed by. It is written “the Lord plagued the people”; and whatever the plague might have been the most terrible evil that could befall Israel was that which now hung over them, the threatened departure of the Lord from their midst. No plague can be so dreadful as when God saith “Let him alone: he is joined to his idols.” Penalty and punishment tell of hope, but to be let alone is the beginning of the darkness of despair. Israel might go up to the land of Canaan, but to Moses the word had been spoken, “I will not go up in the midst of thee.” These tidings were brought to Israel by Moses. He would doubtless point out to them all that this threat involved. The people were already humble and awed by the sharp punishment which Moses had inflicted, and further by the plagues by which God had visited them. They are ready now to listen to his words. So it came to pass that all Israel bowed before God, and put off their ornaments in token of their mourning.

Then Moses gave the people a further opportunity of showing their repentance and of declaring their purpose of service. We read that he took the tabernacle and pitched it without the camp, far off from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass that everyone who sought the Lord went out into the tabernacle of the congregation which was without the camp. Whatever else it meant it was the token that God had withdrawn from the midst of Israel. He was afar off, and they who would find Him must go forth “without the camp.” At first sight it is somewhat perplexing to read of the tabernacle when as yet it was not in existence. The command to build the tabernacle had been given with all explicit and minute directions as to every part of it, the chosen wood and the gold over-laying it, and the enclosure of rich tapestries and the skins that were to protect it. And Aaron and his sons were to be consecrated for its service and arrayed in robes of beauty and glory, and the sacrifices were appointed in precise order. But as yet all these things had only been seen in the heavenly pattern, and the preparation had been delayed by the idolatry of Israel.

What, then, was the tabernacle which Moses set up for the worship of God, without any direction from heaven, and without any such decoration and distinction as that which had been commanded?

No doubt it pointed both backward and forward, and it may be regarded as the transition from the Patriarchal to the Levitical. As Abraham and Isaac and Jacob had pitched their tent and builded their altar and then called upon the name of the Lord, so we may conclude that in the encampment of Israel there was set up the altar of the Lord, at which the sacrifice was offered and where the people worshipped. That altar would probably be close to the tent of Moses; and both for worship and for counsel the tent of Moses would come to be known as the tabernacle, “a tent of meeting,” for that is the meaning of the word. But yet I think there is more in it than that. To Moses had been revealed the vision of the tabernacle in all its splendour, and the sight of the priest who was to minister to the Lord and to intercede for the people. And now Moses, urged by the need and sin of the people, thrust onward by his own great love and eagerness, cannot stay for the finished work; he dare not wait for the anointed priest in his ephod and with golden breastplate. He will pitch his own tent for the tabernacle. He will himself become the high priest of the people and intercede on their behalf. It was a daring thing, a presumption that was threatened and even punished with death on a later occasion. But this was the resistless eagerness of the soul that was ready to perish or to prevail for Israel. It was the daring of ESTHER when for her people she ventured unbidden into the presence of the king, saying, *If I perish, I perish.*

The ceremony was one that the people understood. Doubtless they knew the peril that Moses had dared for their sakes. And as he passed without the camp all the people rose up and stood, every man in his tent door. What a hush falls upon the camp, what fears fill every soul as Moses goes on his way. And lo! as Moses entered into the tabernacle “the cloudy pillar descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and THE LORD talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door.”

Love, true love, is never presumption. If the ways of wisdom are justified of her children, surely the ways of love are sanctified; and true love doth make the ground holy whereon she sets her foot. We need dwell upon it, for it is a sublime lesson and has for us much instruction. God, the God of Israel, is gone. They have sinned and grieved Him, and lo! He is withdrawn from their midst. Think what that Presence meant—*My Presence*. Without that how helpless were they, how lonely, how undone. Whence could they find the very food they ate, the water they drank? That Presence was their shade by day, and their safety by night. Who else could guide them through that trackless waste? And He was gone. *But one man is the means of communication*. One man keeps the intercourse open, bringing up to God the wants and confession of the people. One man pleads with great entreaty for the host, one man prevails and comes forth with forgiveness and deliverance for the host.

There is much in it that is mysterious. That cloud of the Divine presence is intended to conceal a glory that was too great for a mortal gaze, whilst it does reveal God as accessible to mortal man and willing to commune with him. Why intercession is needful I cannot tell. Why the mediator should be there I know not. But what of that? Who of us can know what is the righteousness of the Most High? Who of us can know what claims must be satisfied before forgiveness can be spoken? Even with us erring creatures the majesty of the law is our greatness; the security of life and of property is the basis of civilisation in every nation. The greatness of a nation is exactly in proportion as the righteousness of the law is honoured and maintained. Who then shall measure the claims of God’s holiness? If all were too hard for me to understand, I should doubt if these things come of God. I should doubt if they were intended for man. But here is at once enough for me to compass and enough for me to wonder at. I can understand enough to satisfy me, but I should be less than satisfied if I could understand all. But amidst the mysteries of intercession and mediation let us be sure of this, quite sure that in the heart of the Eternal Father there is no sleeping pity that needs to be quickened, no lingering purpose of love that must be stirred and moved by our entreaty. Not to Him is it that we need cry aloud for that peradventure He sleepeth. For ever and ever stands that great utterance of the Lord Jesus Christ; the sublimest truth that heaven ever spake or earth ever heard—*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*. From that everlasting fountain of infinite love there comes unasked, unsought, the great gift of our salvation. And yet remains the mystery of intercession. The scene is the very A B C of the Gospel; the dawn of that which was to grow with the ages until it reached the noontide glory. *“If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”* Moses would fain have given himself a ransom for the people, did indeed give himself in purpose and entreaty. But that which he could not accomplish, a greater than Moses has wrought for us. *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world*. Linger over the sight of Moses as the link between Jehovah and Israel, bearing Israel’s sins and sorrows into the Divine presence, bringing grace and forgiveness into the midst of Israel. We have a near Kinsman, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, who bears our sins and sorrows before the Almighty. Listen to Moses as he pours out his heart in entreaty for the people. We have a pitiful Saviour touched with the feeling of our infirmities, who loved us and gave Himself for us, and who is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him.

But linger over the scene again not only to see a blessed type of Christ, *but to find an example for ourselves*. This intercession is a work in which all God’s people are to find a

place, and that the highest place they can find. Every need of our poor world, and every bit of love in our heart should urge us to the exercise of this gift. To take from me my power of intercession is to destroy that which is noblest and best in my nature. If a mother could not pray for her children would not motherhood lose more than half its sanctity and blessedness? If I cannot break through all forms and ceremonies, swept by the impulse of a great love for my brother, then is my noblest life chilled and choked and strangled. The heart must be able to leap with its longing to God, and then most surely and swiftly when it is to tell Him of the needs and sorrows of others, to bring to them the assurance of His help and blessing. Every day, every hour, every moment, there are miracles of love and deliverance wrought in our very midst by intercessory prayer; greater miracles than opened eyes and dead men raised. Men and women upon whom do come holy influences, forces that melt hard hearts and bend stubborn wills and cast out devils. We need to get the message of this power wrought in us, that God is stayed and kept within reach of Israel by the influence of the man of prayer. Those human hands do keep the Almighty. Joshua bids the sun stand still, but what might is this to stay the very God of Heaven! We honour the men who put the forces of the world with our reach and make them available for us; the water and steam and electricity. If we could see rightly we should know that the really great men and women are they who keep the influences of God within reach of the world; the supreme greatness and glory of Jesus Christ is that by Him God comes within reach of us, and comes into the midst of us and dwells with us, known, loved, rested in as our Father. Of all on earth first and greatest and best are they who take most of earth's sins and sorrows up to heaven, and bring down most of God's grace and benediction. "Behold," cried St. John, "*a door was opened in heaven.*" Every Christian man and every Christian woman is the opening of such a door, by which something of earth's sorrow shall fly up to heaven, and something of heaven's good shall assuredly flow down to earth. Ah! what a thing is this, to have such a possibility and power and not to use it—to be the door, and yet *to be shut*. To keep earth and heaven separate—to stop the intercourse. To us all are the words spoken, "Lift up your heads, ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in."

THE PRAYER OF MOSES AND ITS ANSWER

"I beseech Thee shew me Thy glory." —EXODUS xxxiii. 18.

What was the glory which Moses longed to behold?

NOTHING can be more vague and indefinite than this word glory. Everything that is Divine must be glorious: the works of God are glorious; the purposes of God are glorious; every manifestation of God is full of His glory. Was this, then, the vague longing of the heart, like the vague longing of the little child for the rest and presence of the mother? This lonely man, a whole heaven above these murmuring slaves about him, must often have turned panting for God as "the hart panteth after the water brooks." And it might be especially so just now when he was oppressed by the mad folly and wickedness of this people, blind as they were to all the great purposes of God, forgetful of all their splendid past, so lightly turning from the sublime revelations of Jehovah to the most foul and abominable idolatry. Sick at heart, filled with despair, wearied and oppressed, well might Moses long with all his soul for the vision of God's glory. But as we turn to the incident out of which this entreaty comes, we shall see clearly what it was that Moses longed to behold.

Shew me Thy glory. No man had seen the glory of God as Moses had seen it. He had beheld the glory of the Creator. Day after day it had been set before him in successive visions. The majesty of the Maker of heaven and earth spread before him in exceeding glory. He had seen the glory of the Most High as the Deliverer of His people. In the plagues which overthrew the power of Pharaoh what might and majesty was there! And never had earth beheld a sublimer manifestation of glory than when Israel, hemmed in on every side by perils and pursued by the horsemen of Pharaoh, marched triumphantly across the sea. Well might they sing, "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders." And Moses had seen, as none else had seen, the glory of the Lawgiver. To him God had spoken as a man speaketh to a friend, and by him had given the words by which henceforth His people were to live. Yet beyond this threefold glory there was another for which the soul of Moses longed. What was it?

The incident itself will afford us the clue. He had come down from the Mount of God with the majesty of the revelation resting upon him, and with the words of the Most High still sounding within him, when suddenly as he turned some rocky winding of the mountain path there burst upon him the shout of the people—wild songs, the accompaniment of lascivious dances and foul idolatries. Then he reached some further point from which in that clear air he saw the hosts gathered about the golden calf, and there rang the shout, "These be thy gods, O Israel." Instantly the soul of Moses was kindled to a white heat of indignation. Hurling to the ground the tables of law, he ran to the gate of the camp, and shouted to all who were on the Lord's side to gather about him. Then rushing amongst the naked idolaters, he and his followers smote right and left, until three thousand men lay dead upon the desert sand, and the rest of the guilty host fled terrified from his presence. Look at the man. Anger, jealousy for God, fiery indignation filled him so that he could but smite, as incapable of pity as if there were no room for patience, no possibility of forgiveness.

But look again at this great leader of the people. See him as he turns from them to God. See how he takes upon himself this people's sin as if it were his own, feeling the curse and shame of it as they never could. Listen how he pleads on their behalf. His soul is all entreaty. All his heart yearns over them. He is ready to cast himself between them and the sword of justice. He is ready to die for them and infinitely more than die. "This people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now if Thou wilt forgive them:—*But if not, blot, I pray Thee, my name out of the Book of Life.*" Such is the man, so eager for his people that for their sakes he will give up all the great recompense of the reward for which he had left all the splendour and wealth of Egypt.

The prayer of Moses prevails. The presence of God is restored to Israel. And as the gracious assurance is given, Moses prays "I beseech Thee shew me Thy glory." What glory could it be save that which could reconcile these diverse feelings that had filled his own soul? As if he cried, "Shew me, O God, how Thou canst be just and yet be love. In Thee must burn as a consuming fire an indignation against sin. What is this faint anger of mine to Thine abhorrence of such evil: and yet in Thee is pity that pleads and delivers. . . . Shew me, O God, this glory of a *righteous love*: the glory of a holiness that is unsoiled and yet forgives." This was the conflict in the heart of Moses. If this were no conflict in the heart of God, what was the mystery and glory of their reconciliation? That, whatever it was, was the supreme glory of God. So is begotten within the man this cry, "*I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory.*"

And now let us turn to the answer that God gave to the prayer of Moses. He is directed to come up early in the morning and to present himself to the Lord on the top of the mountain. And there hidden within the clefts of the rock he is to be in darkness whilst God passed by. Then came a voice proclaiming, *The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin; that will by no means clear the guilty.*" And as Moses heard the voice he ran and bowed his head to the ground, and worshipped satisfied, and he takes from his heart that which was dearer than his own life, and sets it in the keeping of this God of love. "O Lord, let my Lord, I pray Thee, come among us, and pardon our iniquity and sin, and take us for Thine inheritance."

There is much in the scene that is mysterious. How indeed could it be otherwise in such a revelation of the Most High? But much is clearly revealed for our instruction. There is that in God which we cannot know. We cannot know the holiness of God. If the soul of man is stirred to indignation as Moses was stirred by the sight of Israel's idolatry, who can ever tell what our sin means in the sight of God! If we once looked upon the undimmed glory of the Sun of Righteousness we should be for ever overwhelmed: the eyes of hope should be smitten and sealed in despair. But all His goodness can pass before us, and we can listen to the voice proclaiming, "The Lord, merciful and gracious." So comes again the question, How can holiness and love be one? There is, there *can* be, but one answer—the answer of God Himself in the vision of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of Man. From that mountain height Moses saw the day of Christ and was glad. He who long after appeared on the Mount of the Transfiguration talking with the Saviour of the death that He should accomplish at Jerusalem, had looked on and seen into this mystery. It is this supreme glory of God which St. Paul sets forth with such adoring joy: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (a mercy seat) through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins . . . that He might be just, the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." It is only hidden in the Rock of Ages that I can look forth upon the satisfying vision. In God I see a holiness which is my despair. How can I find in Him a love that can forgive and bless? Pardon at the expense of righteousness cannot be the ground of my faith. It gives away too much. Pardon loses the very pledge of its security unless it is rooted and grounded in righteousness. In the Cross of Christ, righteousness and love have met and triumphed in forgiveness. That is the glory, the supreme glory of God. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.

The incident has yet two other lessons which we should learn. This is the demand and craving of the earth, "Show us Thy glory." The impatient Church wants that which should dazzle and compel. It is the cheap and easy and superficial way to victory. It was the temptation which met the Messiah as He set out on His work. "Put forth Thy divine power: command that these stones be made bread, and who shall not follow Thee?" Bedazzle and bewilder men by the manifestations of Thy glory. Cast Thyself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and let men see Thee light uninjured on the ground. This is the craving of the heart—splendour, majesty, glory. But the answer of heaven is ever and always this, "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth." This is the great lesson

that Elijah has to learn. He would have for the rebellious people and for the idolatrous Jezebel the thunderbolt, the earthquake, the fire. But he must learn that God is not in these, but in the small voice. This must subdue the world.

It was thus that the coming of Christ so cut across the expectation of Israel. They looked for a King of kings and Lord of lords, who should execute vengeance upon their enemies; who should be proclaimed by all the signs of heaven and all the wonders of the Almighty. But lo! this is the sign of which the angels sing, "*Ye shall find the young Child wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*" We in our little work do need to be constantly reminded of it. We often long for some great token of the Divine presence, some overwhelming revelation to our own soul, or some mighty manifestation. No, that is not God's plan. If we will go up to the Mount, up from the dust and mists of earth, and wait before God, we shall hear the voice proclaiming, "*The Lord God, merciful and gracious.*" This is the truth that all must learn, that love is glory: kindness, pity—patient and helpful pity—this is the Almighty power which is to uplift the world. Within our own hearts this is the proof given us of our own salvation, that we love our brothers. This is strength and this is victory, to be merciful and gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth. Take it and rest in it, that love is genius, and love is philosophy, and love is power—for God is love.

Not less important is the second great lesson of our subject: *That the supreme good of our life is that we should know God.* We see how this incident has prepared Moses for this further revelation of God. Every man's conception of God is the best that is in him, the loftiest of which he is capable. Now the supreme purpose of God is that in all the events of every day we should grow in the knowledge of Himself. See how life is adapted to this purpose in the relationship of father and mother, the very helplessness and dependence are to develop trust and obedience and love, which when thus developed are to be extended to the Father in heaven. The meaning of all life is wrapped up in this; its mercies, its mysteries, its duties, its sorrows, its pleasures, its relationships—social, political, commercial—are all to teach us of Him. In a remarkable sermon of Beecher's I find these words: "I can bear witness to this, that not all the books, and not all the influences beside, have ever done so much for me as the attempt to find in my conception of God that which should do good to some fellow being. In the presence of men who were enquiring, in the presence of men who were fettered hand and foot, in the presence of men who were bewildered, or depraved, or embittered, to find such a conception as would bring the light and power of the divine nature into their souls, has been the instruction that has lifted me into nobler and grander, and I think truer conceptions of the divine nature than books have recorded, or than could otherwise have been framed."

Thus love, true deep, tender love to others is the secret that reveals the knowledge of God. So true is it, *He that loveth knoweth God, for God is love.*

FROM SINAI TO THE WATERS OF MERIBAH

NUMBERS x. 3 to xx.13.

THE great purpose in Sinai has been completed. The law has been given, and the ritual of Jewish worship has been revealed by God and set up, so far as their wandering life permitted, with a solemnity which must have greatly impressed these hosts. Aaron moved amongst them in his robes of beauty and glory. In their midst stood the tabernacle of the Lord, with its manifestation of the Divine Presence. Every day rose the smoke of the sacrifice. There were given to them many new indications that they were the people of God, called with a high and holy calling as His witnesses amongst the nations of the earth. Now that all this has been accomplished they set forth on their journey towards Canaan. Moses may well have looked that with a settled law, and with such an ordered service there should be no further delay; that they might march on day by day to possess the goodly land. How great, how bitter his disappointment was is manifest.

It was not long before the rough rebellious spirit of the multitude showed itself again. Wearied at the journey, its monotony and apparent hopelessness, the angry murmurings of the people rose once more. It commenced with the mixed multitude—the Egyptians, who frightened by the plagues and tempted by the glowing expectations of Israel had gone *with* them, but were never *of* them. It may be that the more gorgeous ritual and the more manifest superiority of Israel had made a deeper distinction between these camp-followers and the people of God, and left them the more ready for revolt. In punishment there fell the lightning of God and set fire to their tents, a peril that must have threatened the whole encampment. The fire was quenched, but the murmuring spirit survived the deliverance, and these lawless stragglers, vexed at the thought of having left Egypt for the wilderness, and still more at having joined themselves to a people whose fortunes they could but lightly share but whose misfortunes they were constantly to endure, cried out against the food thus provided and lusted for the rich luxuries of Egypt. The soul of Moses is tried beyond endurance, and he prays that he may die, wearied and burdened by the incessant grumbings. “I am not able to bear this people alone,” he cries in his misery, “because it is too heavy for me. And if Thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in Thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.”

In compassion for his weariness God gave him seventy men—called them out and directed them to stand about the tabernacle, and sent upon them His Spirit so that they prophesied. And these were to stand with Moses and between him and the people. But as for the murmurers they ate in their greed of the quails that came along their way, so that a plague broke out amongst them and many died.

Sorer still was the trial that was come upon the great leader of God’s host. From the lips of the mixed multitude it were bad enough, a thing that Moses resented and God severely punished. But now his foes are to be those of his own household. His wife Zipporah was dead, and Moses had taken as his wife another who is referred to as an “Ethiopian” or Cushite woman. Miriam took upon herself to make it the ground of a revolt against Moses. The elder sister, to whom Moses had long ago owed a great debt of gratitude, a woman partaking of the family gifts as well as the family honour, it was hard for her to have to occupy a place second to this “Ethiopian stranger,” and she angrily resents it. Aaron sides to some extent with her; at any rate he suffers her to speak in his name. “And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses. . . . And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath He not spoken also by us?” It struck not only at the authority of Moses but at the authority of God. What hope was there for Israel’s obedience and submission if Miriam and Aaron were to proclaim themselves the leaders of Israel, and to claim to speak to the people in the name of the Lord? All order was at

an end; all authority was gone. Strife and faction should reign everywhere, and split into rival hosts the people should separate and perhaps turn against each other.

Now to the heart of this meekest of men there could have come no sorer trial. He had shrunk from the high position he occupied until his unwillingness almost amounted to disobedience. He had given up all honour and high position for the welfare of his household and brethren. Never was there in this world a man who had sought less to assert himself or to gain his own ends. Never had any great leader more hardships to endure, or a more difficult post to fill. To Miriam and Aaron were given positions of influence and power quite as great as they were fitted for. It has been suggested that the recent promotion of Aaron to the priesthood had begotten already something of that arrogance and haughty intolerance which seem inseparable from the priesthood, but in this case at any rate there is more of a woman's jealousy than a priest's bigotry.

The meekness of Moses show itself in the silence with which he meets the charge. But God takes up his cause and avenges it. Upon Miriam falls the curse of leprosy—she became white as snow. And although in answer to the intercession of Moses she is restored, yet she is shut out from the camp for a week as one defiled, and it may be that she bore upon her the marks of that terrible visitation until her dying day.

Yet even all this, bitter as it was, is less bitter than the further trial which awaits him. The children of Israel have now reached the border of the Holy Land. It is fifteen months since they quitted Egypt, and now they are within sight of the mountains—(see Deut. i. 20m 21). But the hearts of the people shrank from entering the land of whose inhabitants they had heard so much; and they begged that Moses would send up spies who should bring them the report of the land. Twelve men were sent; and they came back bearing the tidings that the land was good *but*—ah, it was a great black hopeless *but* in the ears of Israel—the cities were walled up to heaven, and the men were sons of Anak, and Israel would have no chance of overcoming them. In vain Caleb and Joshua, two of the spies, declared that they were able to possess it. In vain they told of the goodly land and of the grapes that grew in it. A great despair seized the hearts of the people. They had left all and lost all. Deceived after such a journey and so many hardships; led on by such brilliant expectations; dreading lest the enemy should sweep down upon them and slay them with their wives and little ones, weeping and furious they broke into a fierce revolt. "Let us make us a captain and let us return to Egypt," was the cry that burst from the lips of the people. In vain did Joshua and Caleb seek to still the people and tell them of the goodly land. The angry cry arose that they should be stoned. Then flashed upon the host the glory of the Lord and His voice was heard, "How long will this people provoke Me? How long will it be before they believe Me, for all the signs which I have shewed amongst them? I will smite them . . . and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they." Instantly Moses is full of pity for the rebellious people, and falls before God in eager intercession. He pleads the promise that had been spoken in the Mount, "Let the power of my Lord be great, according as Thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression. . . . Pardon, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Thy mercy, as Thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt until now."

Once more the prayer is heard and the people are spared. But of all that generation none are suffered to see the goodly land except Caleb and Joshua. "But your little ones which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. But as for you, your carcases, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years. . . . After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, . . . each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years." As soon as the people heard the decision, in their madness "they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the Lord hath promised." In vain Moses entreated them—"Go not up, for the Lord is not among you. . . . But they presumed to go up unto the hill top . . . Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in the hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah."

What an utterly unmeaning and stupid thing is this unbelief! Surely if God could bring them out of Egypt He could bring them into Canaan. If with such splendid triumph Jehovah could deliver into their hands Pharaoh and his host, who were these Amalekites that they should fear them?

But to Moses what an unutterable grief must this penalty have been. For another forty years they were to wander, when he had seemed so near the end of his great life-work, and when the rest for which he longed so greatly was within reach. The months since he had left Egypt had been a continual grief and weariness, and is he to go on the same dreary round for forty years more! Are we ready to complain that such sacrifice and such nobility should be so scantily rewarded? Well, the reward depends upon what Moses reckoned life's best. If the reward were in wealth or greatness, then he had left behind him more than he could find elsewhere; if it were in ease and indulgence, then he should have tarried in the palace of Egypt. He found a poor return for his service if this were the reward. But we must look for his recompense elsewhere. We can only understand the man and the history aright when we remember how he had been lifted up to find in God his satisfaction and his joy. Think of him wearied, yet think of him of whom it was spoken, "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest." Think of him vexed by the miserable murmurings of this host, a set of slaves with scarce soul enough to be saved, yet remember the other side of it all—how that all God's goodness was made to pass before him, and there were given him such visions of the glory of God as none else ever had.

Once more they set out on their journey, a dreary, weary wandering. The foolish encounter with the Amalekites had destroyed the dread of Israel which had fallen upon all people, and doubtless exposed them to frequent attacks. The days were for the most part dull and monotonous, almost without incident, mournfully waiting for a generation to die. Then it is that Korah, a Levite and a cousin of Aaron, stirs up the tribe of Reuben to revolt. Reuben was the firstborn and should have the rulership, and he himself should be the priest. This rebellion is punished by the sudden death of the leaders. But the people seem to rush to their own destruction. The next day all Israel murmured against Moses, clamouring that he had slain the people of the Lord. Then there came upon them a plague which threatened to destroy them all, but Moses intercedes once more, and the plague is stayed. Meanwhile, it is evident that there is a brighter side of these years of wanderings. There is growing up a new race that had never been in Egypt, had never been degraded by its idolatry and its bondage; a nation hardier and of a braver spirit.

As the forty years draw to a close once more the encampment is at Kadesh Barnea near to the land of Canaan. And here Miriam died. The first break in that family which had done such great things for Israel. They mourned for her thirty days.

Then came an incident which had much to do with the career of Moses and Aaron. Once again the water had failed, and the host murmured against Moses and Aaron, that they had brought them up into the wilderness to kill them. At once Moses laid the matter before the Lord, and he was directed to take the rod and gather the assembly together; and he with Aaron should speak to the rock before their eyes, and it should pour forth water. But instead of an exact obedience by which God should have been sanctified in their eyes, Moses was vexed and angry with the people. Instead of speaking to the rock in the name of God he spoke unadvisedly to the people. We cannot wonder. It is not for us to blame him who are so much below him. But evidently he forgets both God and the commandment. Turning upon the people he dries, "Hear now, ye rebels, must *we* fetch you water out of this rock?" And then turning in his anger to the rock he smote it with the rod instead of speaking to it only. Moses, eminent and zealous as he has been for the Lord of Hosts, is not to be spared for such an offence. "Because ye believed Me not *to sanctify Me* in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." And Aaron was to share in the penalty. "Aaron shall be gathered to his people. He shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against My word at the waters of Meribah."

Now as the story stands we must all feel that the penalty was out of all proportion to the offence; that considering the provocation which Moses had endured from these people, and considering the noble endurance and sacrifice which he had made for them, it was an utterly cruel thing to shut him out of Canaan for a hasty word. Every instinct tells us that this could not have been all. The charge against Moses is that *ye believed Me not*. To Moses, an old man, no thought was so dear as that he should see the great purpose of his life fulfilled, for which he had surrendered everything. At this very place the wicked murmuring of the people had driven them back for forty years. Now that weary time is almost done. At last he may hope, at last he may breathe. He moves amongst the people eager to check the first complaint: eager to stimulate their faith and hope. If again they are turned back he can never hope to set foot in Canaan, he must perish like the rest in the wilderness. Alas, the water supply is failing them. Will the people have faith in God? Nay, the murmuring spreads, and now the people gather furious and clamouring. Then his heart sinks within him. It is all of no use. This generation is no better than the last. These are rebels as were their fathers. They, too, will faint at the sight of the cities walled up to heaven, and at the verge of Canaan will again provoke God. Miserable rebels, why should he care what becomes of them? Why should he be wearied and vexed about them, if this is their spirit? Such is the meaning of the words "*Ye rebels,*" must we fetch *you—you*, such a set of miserable ingrates as you are—water out of this rock? He was worn out, indignant. Water was too good for such as they were. He grudged it, and almost resented their having it. Good water was wasted upon such a set. And in his rage he lifted up the rod and smote the stone. It was a sin, a great sin, to be punished in the eyes of all Israel.

And in setting the offence beside the penalty there are two things to be remembered. Nothing could teach Israel so solemn and impressive a lesson in obedience as this—Aaron's death—that no position, no solemnity of office could lessen the penalty of disobedience; and that even Moses the man of God must suffer. How solemn, how terrible a thing was the commandment of the Most High! And notice the effect of this penalty. That which plagues and punishments failed to do, this accomplished, "*The murmurings of Israel ceased at the waters of Meribah.*" Does it seem hard to us that Moses should be punished sharply that Israel might be cured of grumbling. Well, in that life which is to come, when all is made plain, shall it not heighten and brighten the recompense of the reward, that the penalty which Moses endured wrought for Israel so great a good? Is there here no high service?

And remember again that the exclusion of Moses from Canaan was not only a penalty: it was the completion of the type. Moses could not bring the people in. He is the type of the law. They must wait for Joshua which is Jesus to lead the people into the goodly land. Is it no joy, no compensation so to belong to God that He can use us thus for the fulfilling of the great purposes? This, too, assuredly shall in no wise lose its reward.

THE SERPENTS IN THE WILDERNESS

“And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it on a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived.” —NUMBERS xxi. 9.

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” —ST. JOHN iii. 14, 15.

IT is very instructive to notice the New Testament use of the Old Testament record of Moses. His history and its incidents are constantly referred to as illustrations and types of Christ. St. Paul again and again finds his illustrations in the life of Moses, and much more than illustrations. Not with any curious fancy is it that his sturdy logic finds the materials for two compact arguments in these chapters. The manna, the rock, the veil on the face of Moses, are all immediately connected with Jesus Christ. St. John, too, in the Book of Revelation constantly finds here the imagery by which he sets forth the things which are to come. And the Church in all ages has found in Egypt and the wilderness journey to the goodly land a very Pilgrim's Progress. No type is more familiar, no illustration more constant. The arrangements of Jewish worship are full of predictions of Christ—living pictures of our salvation. The Lord Jesus is the sacrifice for our sins—the Lamb of God which beareth away the sins of the world. He is the Mercy-seat, as the word propitiation is rendered in the marginal reference. He is the High Priest who ever liveth to make intercession for us, and who is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by Him.

So is it that the unity of the Scriptures is in Jesus Christ. We do not see Him rightly until we see Him as the subject of all Scripture, the object of all history, the source and completion of all nature.

Of all the references to our Lord which are taken from the life of Moses nothing is so pathetic as the words of the Lord Jesus Himself, when He finds in this incident the image of His own great salvation.

Let us set before ourselves the two scenes—Israel is still journeying through the wilderness. To punish them for their murmuring and departure from God they are visited by a plague of serpents, spreading a terrible panic amongst the people. They spring with deadly coil from the sand. They lurk unsuspected in the stunted shrubs. They hide in the crevices of the rock. They creep within the folds of the tent. There is a shriek, and neighbours hurry to find one within gasping, fallen, dead! Now a strong man writhes in anguish and is stretched a corpse. The dreadful hiss is heard and a mother snatches her child. Alas, too late! She presses the dead body to her breast. They multiply till no life is safe, no place is free. The calm night is rent by the cries of the victims and the mournings for the slain. Hundreds are dead on the way. Households are dead at dawn. Then the people come to Moses, saying, “We have sinned; entreat the Lord for us.” Like a faithful High Priest bearing the guilt of the people Moses passed into the Divine Presence, and prayed for their deliverance; then God directs him to take a serpent of brass, and set it up on a pole; and whoever looked at it should live. With the cry of the perishing urging him to haste, Moses shaped the serpent and set it up glistening in the desert sun. “And it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.” Such is the one scene.

The other scene is in the quiet of the night where Jesus sat talking with Nicodemus. Recalling this incident of Israel he found in it a type and prophecy of Himself. *“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”* The words are spoken as He stands on the threshold of His work. Think how vividly there must ever have risen before Him that dread purpose of His coming. Think how as He read the Scripture there met Him constantly all that pointed to the Cross. As He walked in the temple, how every altar proclaimed His

agony: the lamb, the dove, the bullock, the very bread He ate were emblems of the death He must die. Yet with what a calm fearlessness He speaks it. With what a steady courage and unfaltering purpose He faces it. Think of that love that never halted; of the strength that never failed; of the courage that was never turned aside. Never hastening, never hindered, He came on His way with a sublime heroism. Let us rest and exult in the great Captain of our salvation, who could look onward so calmly to the end: "*Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*" Putting the two scenes together we have a *weird picture of sin*; and a *blessed picture of salvation*.

Here is a weird picture of sin. Upon the still air of the wilderness there rings a cry. The people, roused from their noontide rest, run together. Here lies one writing in the dust. What ails him? There is no wound from which the life is oozing. There are no broken limbs, no sign of any blow. "Bring him forth from the tent," saith one, "it is the heat." "Set him in the shade," said another. "It is the sun," said a third, "stand back and let him have the air." "He is faint and overdone," said another, "give him food." But deeper than their eyes can see lies the mischief. As if the heart had turned traitor to the man, it hurries the poison through his veins and sends it throughout the system. It creeps into the brain and leaves it darkling; it goes along the limbs and leaves them powerless. Then his struggles cease, the man groans and dies. The mischief is *within* him. We talk of condition, temptation, surroundings, but deeper than these is the poison of sin. It is *within* us—*within* us; an accursed poison in the soul. It paralyses the will and leaves us indifferent and dead to God. It creeps into the mind and darkens it to God. Circumstances may aggravate the poison within, but circumstances are neither the cause nor the cure of the mischief. It is deeper than any influences with which we can reach it, and more than any surroundings can undo. *The poison is within.*

And now comes a simple man and ventures to suggest that it is a serpent's bite. If the people of those times were as clever as the clever people of to-day, think of the derision with which it is greeted. "A horrible delusion—an utter superstition. A notion fit for those dark ages before we were born! Look at Man, sir. Do you not know that he is the very top and crown of all creation? See him with his lofty intellect, his kingly will, his majestic bearing, set as one having dominion over the kingdoms of the earth! Do you mean to say that a little contemptible reptile, a thing that creeps in the dust, can touch him, and destroy with such a swift and fatal mystery? Nonsense, sir—it is most unphilosophical." But listen, what is that cry? Run swiftly. Draw back the curtain of his tent. See there creeps the serpent, and there lies the philosopher, dead, *dead*. Dead with all his kingly intellect and lofty words. It was an awfully real thing. Ah! so men talk of sin. It is an article of some ancient creed, a lingering superstition of the priests, a mistake of our training. Would to God it were! Do we not know, have we not felt, this accursed mischief within us? The good we would, we do not; the evil we would not, that we do. Sin a delusion, a notion, a foolish fancy! Why, into what hundreds of homes I could take you this very night where staggers the drunken man; the drunken woman; and where the wretched, white-faced, ragged children cower terrified. Go and ask the outcast loathing life; go and ask the drunkard as he grinds his teeth and curses that which is dragging him down to hell, body, soul, and spirit. Do you object that I have taken an extreme case? Where did the extreme cases begin? What made these extreme and exceptional cases, if sin is not a hideously real thing? And turn to the noblest, the purest, the best you have ever read of. Do not their confessions, their prayers, their struggles tell us the same thing? *Sin is real*, horribly, awfully, accursedly real. As the man who has tried to break its fetters, and cast off its tyranny. *It is real.*

Look yet again—*The bite was fatal*. Much people died. It was not light affliction, which was but for a moment, a passing inconvenience that wore away with time; no sickness was it from which prudence and care could recover them. Not as when Paul shook off his venomous beast into the crackling flames, and it perished there. He who was bitten *died*; old and young, strong man and frail woman. "Ah," said some of those who are always ready to make light of any illness unless it is their own, "he will get over it; he is young, and his age is on his side." "Ah," said another, "look what a splendid constitution he has, he will mend." "Ah," said

another, "we must hope for the best." *But much people died.* It is the awful picture of sin. It can have but one ending—death—death—death. The soul that sinneth it shall die, so rings the warning of God. How foolishly we talk of it. When it is the child, we say, "He is young and will grow better." When it is the youth, we say, "Let him sow his wild oats, and he will settle down." Ah, what cruel folly! *What a man soweth that shall he also reap.* When it is middle age, we say, "Yes, it is very sad, but he has a great many good points you know." Well, we must hope for the best." And in upon this Babel there comes the terrible note of doom: *The wages of sin is death, death, death.* Ever are those two joined together, and joined together of God, no man can put them asunder. There is but one power that can ever sever these two, and that is the Cross of Jesus Christ. My brother, hold up the lamp of God, and let it fall out here upon the path in which you are going, and look on the end of it. What voices are those that sound from heaven, how tender and entreating, how loud and commanding, bidding us flee from the wrath to come. What voices are these that sound from another world, weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth!

The lips of Jesus Christ the blessed Brother and Saviour of men, He who came not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved, He hath spoken of "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched." Figurative? Certainly, but what underlies the figure? What does it shape and set forth? I know not—God grant we never may! But it is the figure which sets forth the end and doom of sin. If sin is a light thing to be excused and laughed away, what is the meaning of that Cross? Why, then, *must* the Son of Man be lifted up? There in that shame and curse and agony, I see sin as I can see it nowhere else. Sin is a deadly and fatal thing—Sin has but one ending, and that ending is the awful mystery of Hell.

Secondly, *We have a blessed picture of salvation.* "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so is the Son of Man lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Notice, first, *that the remedy came from God.* If they were as enlightened as men are in our times, the people did not die for lack of advisers and opinions. And doubtless they would try all their own remedies before they turned to the Lord. I can think that none would be so busy as *the charmers.* Amongst them would be some who knew the secrets of the Egyptian snake-charmers. In the "mixed multitude" may have been the professional charmer, boasting descent which could not fail in its authority. And they come bringing assured remedies. There is the music that can charm the serpent, and destroy the poison. There is the mystic sign set around the place that made it sacred. There are mysterious magic amulets to be worn for safety; this on the neck, and this about the wrist. There is a ceremony that shall hold the serpent spell-bound and powerless. But come hither. Lift up this curtain. See here one lies on the ground. "He sleeps." Nay indeed, he will never wake again. Why, it is the charmer. Here are the spells and the charms and the mystic signs all about him. And lo! there glides the serpent, the charmer himself is dead.

Many are busy still with their charms—Church services, softened feelings, muttered prayers. Nay, nay, they avail nothing. Religious forms, ceremonies, creeds, are empty and useless if they stop short of the Cross of Christ. "Even so *must* the Son of Man be lifted up." In Him and Him alone is salvation. "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

Others doubtless urged more severe measures. Cut deep into the wounded part, burn out the poison. And still *much people died.* Ah! the agony and strife, the bitter shame, the keen cutting of remorse, the misery and anguish with which we may have striven for deliverance. But in vain—all in vain. Are we not tired of the mummeries of the charmers! Priests and preachers, creeds and theories, is it not time to seek a true remedy? The agony and anguish of our own efforts, the misery of our own failures, can we not find some better way than this?

Moses prayed and there came an answer. Swiftly he bade the workmen make a serpent of brass, and eagerly he set it up upon the lofty staff. And then throughout the camp went the heralds with the tidings—"God hath given us a remedy. When any man is bitten let him look upon the brazen serpent, and it shall come to pass that he shall live." Blessed be God that He

hath devised a way of salvation. We want no other. Against Him I have sinned. With Him alone I have to do, and that which He hath provided I can assuredly accept.

Ah! what a sight it was. Haggard eyes and faces pale in death turned to the glistening sign, and at once the fever ceased, the sufferer lived. Here and there came eager groups, bringing some dying one to look. Gasping he reaches the top of the hill. The vision bursts upon him. He lives! He lives! *“When he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.” “Whosoever believeth in Him hath everlasting life.”*

BEFORE we enter upon this story of Balaam it may be well for us to see what the Scriptures say of him elsewhere. He stands upon the heights of Moab a warning to all the ages, and to none more than this money-loving nineteenth century. Peter points back to this strange figure—"Beguiling unstable souls; an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children, which have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity, the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet." And Jude denounces those "who have run greedily after the error of Balaam for reward." At him the Son of Thunder glances, "Thou hast them there that hold the doctrine of Balaam, to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."

It is not in such dark colours that we set Balaam before us as we read these chapters in the life of Moses. A man really great in many respects; of splendid gifts; in whom the spark of divine fire was fanned by a breath into a flame of loftiest poetry. A seer gifted with that vision of things in the light of God which made him a true prophet; and with the power of uttering that which he saw such as was rivalled only by Isaiah or Moses. And not only a great man, at some time assuredly a good man. He could not have been so bad if he had not been so good, for there is a religious conviction and conduct which go to the making of the worst man, as in the case of the Pharisee in every age. A man this of whom we think as an honest and sincere seeker after God, another Abraham, who listened and heard the voice of God and came to be a faithful witness. Then he began to use his gifts and privileges for his own advancement. There came the lust of power; the lust of position; the lust of gain; and Balaam the prophet and seer of God goes out into the darkness like Judas; almost indeed like another Lucifer, son of the morning, falling headlong from his height, until he creeps a hissing serpent, eating the dust and breathing poison.

The wanderings of Israel have brought them to the eastern corner of Palestine, where dwelt the people of Moab. As the descendants of Lot, and thus connected with Abraham, they are not to share the fate of the Canaanite. But Balak, the king of Moab, having heard of their victories over the other nations, is filled with fear at their coming. He calls the elders together. "This people," saith he, "will lick us up as an ox licketh up the grass of the field. To fight against them will avail us nothing." Then he reminds them of the famous soothsayer whose name and fame have spread throughout the lands. To him they will send, and it may be that he shall come and curse this people, and thus shall they be delivered. So the messengers are sent, and appear before Balaam with their entreaty, fully persuaded of the power of this man. "Come and curse these strangers, I pray thee: for he whom thou blesses is blest; and he whom thou cursest is cursed." If there were in this man any ambition, any love of power, such a request would be sure to find it out. To be summoned by the king for nothing less than the deliverance of the whole nation, to be recognised as possessed of such mysterious power, it was as of his were the voice of a god. Balaam bids the messengers tarry for the night, whilst he enquires of the Lord in this matter. The will of God was plainly declared: "*Thou shalt not go with them: thou shalt not curse this people: for they are blessed.*"

In the morning Balaam met the messengers with the reply, "Get you into your land: for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you." We feel in the words an angry acceptance of the Divine will. He wanted to go. There is no word about the people whom God has blest. Not thus was the prophet of God wont to speak. Think how such a one as Elijah would have thundered it, "As the Lord liveth before whom I stand, I will not go with you, nor will I in any wise curse them whom He hath blessed." An unwilling and reluctant "no" is sometimes the

surest way of saying "yes." It only stimulates the more determined attack. That message is certain not to close the communication. So Balak sends a larger company of more distinguished men, with costlier presents and splendid promises. The highest position should be his. Balaam comes forth to meet them and hears their words. He has his answer, and always speaks piously. "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord to do less or more." A noble answer, if it had ended there. As it was it was too religious. We suspect the kind of man who mouths his pious phrases about everything; who uses his religion as a tread-mark, and quotes Scripture in the prospectus of the company that he promotes. God had spoken to Balaam. God had told him that he should not go, that he should in no wise curse this people. But Balaam bids the company of princes with their splendid presents *wait till the morrow*, whilst he shall see *what more the Lord shall say to him*. There is the man—These pious phrases are but the white robes and phylacteries of the Pharisee. All the soul of the man longed for the told, and thirsted for the position, and cried aloud for the honours. And now this Balaam thinks he can argue God into changing His mind; as if God were such a one as himself, and as if the mind of God were not the everlasting truth, the utterly unchangeable right. So this man trifles with his own conscience, and then trifles with God.

The Lord Jesus has given us a precept which if acted on would save the world half its troubles. "Let your manner of speech be yea, yea, and nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" It is the mixture of yea *and* nay that slays men. Truth with this Balaam is not a thing rooted as the rocks, firm as the mountains, everlasting as God; but it is a thing that can be trimmed; one thing to-day, another to-morrow, according to who may come, or what they may bring. Balaam will find some way of securing all this gold and this proud position, yet without saying anything other than the message of God. Men of this sort to-day pride themselves that they do not tell lies with their lips, but the lie is through and through them. We hear this Balaam assuring himself as to how much good he could do with the money; and of course he would speak no word but that which God spake by him. As if ill-gotten gain is not always of the devil; he keeps the account of it with grim exactness, demanding the uttermost farthing. So begins the strife with God. And it ends as these methods always do, *He may go*. God speaks and speaks plainly; but if His voice be not heeded, it can be argued into silence; and out of that silence it is an easy thing to spell consent. Then when he has it Balaam seems half afraid of the permission he had been so eager to get. Of the two voices that spake within him, one was dumb with dread, and that [was] the voice that had urged him on. Ah, how true it all is about us to-day, men and women miserable because they cannot have their way, and then miserable because they have it, and afraid.

So Balaam goes on his way, which is a going out of his way, ready to spend his rage upon any unhappy creature that presents itself. And unfortunately when a man rides an ass he has not far to seek for the opportunity, especially if the ass stumbles. Suddenly the frightened beast swerved aside from off the road, and in his fury Balaam smote it. Again it stood and swerved, crushing the prophet's foot against the stone wall. And yet again the startled creature stood trembling in a narrow way, and then fell down. "If there were a sword in my hand I would kill thee," cried the angry prophet. Then there appeared the angel of the Lord, "Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass thus? Behold, *thine ass saw me these three times*; unless she had turned aside from me surely I should now also have slain thee, and saved her alive." This mystery of the ass speaking has hidden from us the great meaning of the incident. It may have been as many good men say it was, a dream; or it may have been in Balaam's mind only that the voice was heard; or it may be that He who giveth us speech can endow other animals with it. God's creatures are constantly reproving us if we had but ears to hear them. The mischief is not that they are dumb, but that we are deaf. But what concerns us is the terrible reproof in these words. It was like Balaam's doom. "Thou seer! A prophet of God! Balaam, the man whose eyes God hath opened (xxiv. 3). And this is what thou hast come to! Dimmer of eye and duller of sense than thine ass that thou smitest! *Thine ass saw me*. But thou hast blinded thyself: thou has put out thine eyes. Whither thou goest the seest not." Conscious that the light of God had gone out of him, Balaam cried, "I have sinned." He would

have gone back again, but that could not be. The way of falsehood on which he has entered cannot be retraced. The awful price that must be paid for going wrong is this penalty of having to go on.

Now Balaam draws near to Moab, and at the borders of the country the king waits with his princes to welcome the great deliverer of their nation. There is a tone of reproof in the words of Balak, "Did not I earnestly send for thee? Wherefore camest thou not unto me? Am I not able to promote thee to honour?" But this man does not cringe in the presence of the king. His answer is a noble one, "Lo, I am come unto thee: how now am I able to say anything at all? The word that God putteth in my mouth that will I speak." How much of the true prophet there is in this man, how clear a vision he has of God, and of man's relation to God, appears in the account of this interview which is so strangely preserved in the book of Micah. "Remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him . . . that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord." Balak asks, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Then Balaam replies, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

And now they make preparation for the seer to work his spells and to curse those whom God hath blest. It is indeed a strange scene. At Balaam's bidding they erect seven altars and offer oxen and sheep, as if he would cover his lack of confidence by the greatness and grandeur of his ceremony. Together they king and the prophet climb the height of Moab. And there on some projecting rock he takes his stand bareheaded:

Thy wild hair floating on the eastern breeze,
Thy tranced yet open gaze,
Fixed on the desert haze,
As one who deep in heaven some airy pageant sees.

The stretch of the goodly land lay before him in all its vast expanse. Behind him the wilderness that stretched away to his own land. To the left rose the red mountains of Edom and Seir. The great and terrible desert gleamed to the south. Then came the deep shadows where the Jordan ran; and beyond there rolled the hills of Palestine, the white walled cities dotting the distant landscape. Far away to the north stood the snowy height of Lebanon. And beyond the western horizon he knew there lay the waters of the great sea, on which should come the ships of Chittim. And now his gaze is fixed upon the tents of Israel that spread below him, set in order amidst the acacia groves. It may be that the Pillar of Cloud rested upon them, seeming like the power that protected them against all evil. He stands and gazes in silence, dimly perceiving the great purpose of God concerning this people. His heart envies the blessing that awaits them. In silence he returns with the king to the altars, and there taking his place amongst the princes of Moab, there swept over him the spirit of prophecy as if some unseen hand smote the strings of that tuned soul:

"Behold the King of Moab hath brought me from Aram,
Out of the mountains of the east, saying,
Come, curse me Jacob,
Come, defy Israel.
How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed?
Or how shall I defy whom He hath not defied?
For from the top of the rocks I see him,
And from the hills I behold him:
Lo, it is a people that shall dwell alone,
And shall not be reckoned among the nations.
Who can count the dust of Jacob?

And the number of the fourth part of Israel?
Let me die the death of the righteous,
And let my last end be like his.”

In horror Balak cried, “What hast thou done? Did I not bring thee to curse mine enemies, and behold thou has blest them altogether.” Then came the answer of a prophet—“Must not I take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put into my mouth?” And yet with soul lusting for gain there is that about him which prompts Balak to make another effort. He will bring him to some place from which he can see but the uttermost part of this people, “and shall not see them all.” There it may be that he can cheat God and curse Israel! So once more they stand on the rocky height, the king and the prophet. But again there sweeps within the seer’s soul the wind of God, and he cried, “God is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?” And yet a third time Balak leads Balaam to another point, climbing the mount up which Moses went when he looked forth upon the great stretch of the goodly land. But again the prophet is powerless to breathe a breath of harm against this people. Balak indignant cried, “I called thee to curse mine enemies, and lo, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times.” And once more the prophet faced the king, and stood as with the nobility of former days. “If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind.” And then in an outburst of sublimest poetry Balaam declared the completeness of Israel’s triumph over the nations. *Then Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place.*

So we follow the prophet mounted on his ass and riding away into the wilderness towards his own country. And is it in the loneliness of the way that he begins to think of all that he has left, the splendour of the position, the great gain? Certain it is that he turns seeking Balak. With another face and bearing he takes the king aside. “Balak,” he whispers, “this thing can be done, and I can yet deliver this people into thine hand.” The voice that had rolled in such majestic utterance now hisses in the damnable suggestion, “Let the women of Moab to amidst the men of Israel, and tempt them to the worship of their false gods, and to the observance of their foul festivals. If Israel be allured from the living God, then and then only shall Israel be undone.” So does Balaam come to take his place among the princes of Balak. The silver and gold are his. The plot succeeds, and like a plague spreads the fascination of the idolatry. The men of Israel are mad in their vile devotion. Only the sternest punishment could stay the hideous sin, and in one day there fell no less than three and twenty thousand. The whole nation of Moab perished in the war that followed. And amongst them we read: *“And they slew the kings of Midian . . . Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.”*

It is a grim story. But, alas, it is the story of hosts about us to-day, men who try to cheat God with altars and sacrifices and pious utterance, and yet grasp at gain by the curse and degradation of those about them. This is the man who cried, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” Well has one said, and the words need to be spoken again and again, “Desire for personal salvation is not religion. It may go with religion, but it is not religion. Anxiety for the state of one’s own soul is not the healthiest or best symptom. Of course, everyone wishes, ‘Let me die the death of the righteous.’ But it is one thing to wish to be saved; it is another to wish God’s right to triumph; it is one thing to wish to die happy; it is another to wish to live holily. . . . It is possible to have sublime feelings, great passions, even great sympathies, and yet not to love man.” The selfish motive can never find its satisfaction in Jesus Christ, either in this world or any other. To set Christ ever before us, our Example as well as our Saviour, to be through and through us true to Him, this and this only is our strength and safety.

THE DEATH OF MOSES

“So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in the valley of the land of Moab, . . . but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.” —DEUT. xxxiv. 5-6.

THUS ends the story of Moses the man of God. Away in that lonely height; in sight of the goodly land, alone, utterly alone, he dies. Apart from the people whom he had loved and served so well, untended by wife or sons, he dies and is buried in an unknown grave. In all the world's history there is nothing more pathetic than the end of this wonderful life.

And if it is strange to us, to Israel it was a thousand-fold stranger. To the Jew the burial place was a matter of most sacred importance and careful provision. We recall the precise and solemn way in which Abraham purchased the tomb in the land promised to his seed. How great is the contrast between the death-bed of Jacob and the dying of Moses. Worn out by grief and years, the old patriarch, stretched upon his couch, gathers his sons about him, and his soul bursts into a song of prophecy and blessing. With tender looks of sympathy and all the ministries of love, those about him break the loneliness of death, as they link him through themselves to those latter days of which he tells. And when he has passed away the whole land is eager to do him honour. The skilful physicians embalm him. The Pharaohs themselves could scarcely be borne to their resting-place with more pomp than that with which they carry Jacob to the tomb of his fathers. There is a very great company of horsemen and chariots, and Joseph with all his house and will all the servants of Pharaoh swell the splendour of the occasion. Amidst such tokens of a people's reverence and devotion they carry him to his grave.

And stranger still is it to think that whilst Moses lies in his unknown grave there is another whom this people bring with them from Egypt, and bear through all their wanderings for forty years. The embalmed body of Joseph goes with them, waiting until they shall possess the land of promise and that he may be laid with his fathers.

Is there not in this very fact of the sacred regard that attached to the burial-place the reason for this lonely death and hidden grave? Think of Moses as having led the people of Israel up into the land; think of him as having completed the conquest of the Canaanite; think of the tribes of Israel settled each in its appointed place;—and then Moses, the great warrior and leader with his work done and the hopes of the nation fulfilled, gathers the hosts together that he may bless them, and dies. With what stateliness should they bear him to his grave, his greatness magnified and hallowed by death. With what reverence should they regard his resting-place. Remember how constantly the heroes of other nations have become their gods; how naturally the tomb becomes an altar, and the shrine becomes a temple. Never was there hero that might more readily receive the idolatrous regard of a nation than he whose memory was so immediately associated with their religion, to whom they owed their national existence, their very liberties, their lives, their hopes. How easily should the burial-place of such a saint and hero become a place of pilgrimage and an object of worship. Remember that seven hundred years afterwards Hezekiah is distinguished as the bold reformer who broke in pieces the serpent of brass which Moses had made. Unto that day we are told *the children of Israel did burn incense to it*. Thus is it that for Israel's sake Moses is led up the mountain height away into that utter loneliness, and there he dies and God buries him, and no man knoweth the place of his sepulchre unto this day.

So was it that God fulfilled the supreme effort and desire of His servant's life—that Israel should worship God and Him only. If in some other existence Moses could have seen that the indulgence of his wish to enter Canaan had become the snare and curse of this people, how should he have bewailed it as the very undoing of his life-work. But this death, that seemed so mysterious and apparently so terrible a penalty, becomes the crowning mercy of his life.

Another reason for the lonely death and the hidden grave lies upon the very surface of the record—*Thus Moses died according to the word of the Lord*. It reaches back to the incident at Meribah, and its dreadful result and penalty. Let us recall the incident—how that Moses, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, has again approached the land of promise, and upon its verge the people break out once more into rebellious murmurings. Dreading lest their sin should bar their entrance into the land, Moses speaks angrily to the people, and forgets himself, and forgets God in his vexation—“Shall we fetch water out of the rock for ye rebels!” It is the word of a man who has lost hope and faith, and who begrudges for such a miserable set the water that he is going to give them. For this sin he is forbidden to enter the land of promise. Taking the case as it seems at first sight, we must surely feel that the penalty is out of all keeping with the offence. There are offences that in a leader are worse a thousand times than in a subordinate; but there are offences that are less in a leader than in another. In him who carries the responsibility and burden of the people, who has to arrange for them, who suffers most for their folly, reproof—even indignant and angry reproof—is much more excusable than from him who has neither burden nor responsibility. In this man who dreaded the result of their murmuring because his clear vision sees the nearness of the goodly land, and his righteousness perceives the peril of their sin as their dull spirits could not see it, this provocation might be more readily excused. That his life’s reward should be snatched from him, and his life’s hope extinguished, for such an offence is a thing simply unthinkable. It is in another light that we must look at the incident. We have seen how the death of Moses fulfilled the great purpose and spirit of his life in relation to the worship of the God of heaven. The second great foundation truth which Moses sought to set deep in the soul of Israel, and on which the religion of Israel was built, was the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the inevitable penalty that must follow it—that the wages of sin is death. To the Israelites sin had become a thing so common and so constant that they could scarcely perceive it in themselves. It needed to be brought out and writ large in the eyes of the people. It needed to stand out in all its blackness against the fair white ground of a noble and pure life. It needed to be graven in their souls by some great solemnity, wrought into them imperishably by some dread event and memory. With this purpose to be fulfilled let us follow the story.

All the congregation is gathered at the foot of the mountain. And in their midst stands Moses, the man of God, the great leader of Israel, the deliverer, the lawgiver, the very father of his people. But a little way off lay the goodly land that flowed with milk and honey, on which all his hopes and heart had been set. But the way is barred. *Moses the man of God must die*. Death is ever a solemn thing, even when old age totters feebly on towards the grave. Death is always sad, even when the little babe is snatched from the mother’s bosom, or the slave falls a corpse. But never was death so strange, so sad, so solemn, as here. No sickness had weakened him, no touch of feebleness was there on that noble form. The eye flashed undimmed in its brightness, and he stood as strong and as resolute as when of old he stood in the palace of Pharaoh. Yet he must die. Watched by that whole congregation in awful silence he begins to climb the mountain-side. With eyes dimmed with tears and hearts that smite them for their folly, they watch him step by step. *That is what sin means*. For his sin God spared not Moses, His chosen and faithful servant, to whom He had talked face to face and by whom He had given the law. He who had done more than any other to secure that goodly land—who had dared most, and toiled most, and suffered most—must never set foot within it. Moses must die. In that awful silence think how that great truth went down, down into the hearts of the people, impressing them as no suffering of their own could have done. Fire and earthquake, and stormy winds could never proclaim the exceeding sinfulness of sin as did the still small voice of that dread hour.

Far up the mountain-side there goes that receding figure. He stands upon the height and looks forth upon Israel his people; he sees stretched below him the tents; he lifts, it may be, hands of blessing. And then he is gone. No mortal eye can follow him; no man knoweth the place of his sepulchre unto this day. Then in the sorrow of the thirty days that they wept for Moses, that scene had time to be fixed for ever in their minds. From that day Israel is another

nation. The sight of that departure had uplifted the whole people. We feel as we enter upon the Book of Joshua that we have left the murmurings behind. It is a nation chastened and transformed that enters Canaan.

There is a sense in which the words are themselves fulfilled here—*It is expedient . . . that one man should die for the people*. It was a service that only a noble man *could* render. *Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God*, is the utterance of such an one. And in the clearer light of a land, goodlier even than Canaan, with what abiding fulness of joy shall this brave servant of God see how the great of his life was fulfilled in the very manner of his death.

There is another aspect of the death of Moses full of a sublime significance. *It is the fitness for further and more glorious service*. Moses must go up that mount to proclaim the shame and anguish of sin; in the sight of all Israel he must go under the penalty of its curse, on to its bitter end of death.

But the vision of Moses fades, and there rises before us Another, a greater than Moses. He has gathered His disciples about Him and begun to show unto them what things should happen unto Him. How that He must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes; and be killed. But they have no ears, no eyes for such sorrow, and Peter dares to rebuke His Lord. Then came a week's silence. And in that awful loneliness and agony it may be that Christ would have sunk—the human brain crushed beneath its load unless help comes from heaven. Let us remember that three times in the life of the Lord Jesus there came to Him this celestial ministry. Once when He was an hungered, and the angels brought Him food—once when the heart was overfull of grief and must have broken, as it brake upon the cross, if there had not come the angel strengthening Him. And now, when as we have said, the human brain had been crushed, unless He can find the relief that comes in sympathy, in utterance. And where can that be found? The angels can bring Him bread; they can bring Him strength. But not theirs is it to look into the mystery of our redemption. And of men who is there who can talk with Him? Who knows the depths into which His spirit sinks—the bitter curse, the anguish of that penalty and shame? *“And there appeared Moses and Elias talking with Him of the decease that He should accomplish at Jerusalem.”*

Here is the great recompense of the reward. Here he finds that which explains and justifies and glorifies that lonely death on the mountain height.

How hard, how bitter was the word to Moses, “Thou shalt not pass over Jordan; thy foot shall not set within its borders yet.” Wholly surrendered to that will, Moses goes up the mount to die. And through the ages he waits. And now the Christ is come. Now is that goodly land a thousand times more goodly since His feet have trod those blessed fields. And lo, there He faints, He sorrows. Now is the hour come. And lo, on the mountain height there in Canaan, beside His glorious Lord, Moses takes his stand. As if God had kept His servant until the King of Heaven should welcome him within its borders. For every man and woman of us is it not true—that if any shall give himself up wholly to God, so that He can work out in us His own great purposes, there shall be accomplished sublime service than we dare ask or think? And if God do but have His own way, death shall destroy nothing—shall wither no hope nor cheat us of our inheritance. It shall but fulfil the great services of our life, and the very manner of our death shall fit us for loftier service than we had dreamed of here. Therefore let us pray daily for this grace, to let God have His own way with us perfectly, so shall this perfect blessedness be ours. Amen.